

THE MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL  
AMERICAN UNITARIAN INTEREST IN THE STUDY  
OF  
NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to give as fully as possible the contributions made by American Unitarians to the interest in and the study of non-Christian religions. The period to be studied has been confined to the 19th century for two reasons: In the first place the 19th century was the time in America when the first glimmerings of light began to appear through the shadows of religious dogmatism. For anyone even to think of looking to a religion other than Christian for any evidences of truth, religious or ethical, was to bring down upon his head charges of heresy. Each pioneer had to fight public opinion in order to produce anything worthy of being called an unprejudiced effort, and the study of religions was an untried field into which only the most indomitable minds might venture unafraid. Consequently, it was only the religious liberals who, ostracized from orthodox circles anyhow, could make the attempt without too much concern about the reactions. This century, then, was the period in which wedges were being driven into the phalanx of orthodoxy; when new roads were being cut into the wilderness of religions foreign to the Christian household. The Unitarians were outstanding in this field at that time. My other reason for restricting this study to the 19th century is that now in the 20th century when the History of Religions and the Comparative Study of Religions have been fully accepted as legitimate scientific endeavors there is no particular need to enumerate their various contributions; their services are no



longer unique. Furthermore, the very amplitude and number of investigations into this field, since the Study of Religions has come of age, by Unitarians alone would prohibit its inclusion in a dissertation such as this. For these reasons, then, it has been deemed advisable to stay within the limits of the last century.

It is important to speak of another matter. The Philosophy of Religion and the Study of Religions are very close neighbors and often one will encroach upon the other's territory. It has often been a temptation in preparing this work to bring into consideration many of the philosophical endeavors to fathom the religious mentality of other peoples than Christian and to compare the systems from a philosophical point of view. Much, for example, has been written about Natural Religion which might very properly have been brought under discussion, since the thinkers in their treatises have brought up for review the different theological systems in the world. But the line had to be drawn somewhere, and I have tried to leave out of consideration as much as possible the purely philosophical approaches to the different religions. Sometimes it has been almost impossible to avoid infringing upon the philosophical field, as, for example, in the treatment of Emerson, for how can one very well speak of his interest in other religions without somehow or other bringing in the transcendental element? But for the most part, I believe, attention has been concentrated on the actual additions made to the store of precise knowledge about various religions which are not Christian.

I should not wish to infer in this work that the field of investigation was occupied solely by Unitarians in the 19th century. As far as I know they were the earliest contributors



here in America to this incipient science, but as the century wore on men of other denominations became increasingly interested. For example, there was James Clement Moffat with his A Comparative History of Religions, New York, 1871, who made scholarly and extremely valuable researches. Others who might be mentioned are Philip Schaff, who in his lectures on Theological Encyclopaedia at the Union Theological Seminary dealt concisely yet luminously with this particular discipline, (Theological Propoedeutic, New York, 1893); Charles Mellen Taylor, of Cornell, who promoted the study of Comparative Religions albeit that his discussions of them were included in his lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, (Bases of Religious Belief, Historic and Ideal, New York, 1897); Samuel Henry Kellogg, for many years a missionary in India, and for a time professor in the Western Theological Seminary, Alleghany, Pa., who wrote The Light of Asia and the Light of the World, London, 1885, a comparison of Christianity with Buddhism, and A Handbook of Comparative Religion, Philadelphia, Pa., 1899, which although not impartial gives a survey of the field as a whole; Samuel Ives Curtiss of the Chicago Theological Seminary, who investigated the roots of Semitic religion and published the book, Primitive Semitic Religion To-day, Chicago, 1902; John Henry Barrows, the former President of Oberlin College, Ohio, who besides his work in connection with the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1892-93 lectured on Comparative Religion at the University of Chicago, and at Oberlin, and wrote Christianity the World-Religion, Chicago, 1897, and The Christian Conquest of Asia, New York, 1899; Francis Robert Beattie, Professor at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, who wrote Apologetics, or the Rational Vindication of Christianity, 3 vols., Richmond, Va., 1903. Besides these were Charles



Cuthbert Hall, George Aaron Barton, William Dwight Whitney, David James Burrell, Charles Rockwell Lanman, George Foote Moore, David Gordon Lyon, George William Knox, Edward Washburn Hopkins, Morris Jastrow, Jun., George Stephen Goodspeed, A. V. Jackson, and Edmund Buckley. This list of men who worked directly in the field of Comparative Religions and the History of Religions or who, in kindred fields, gave much attention to the study of religions is an indication of the flowering of these studies in the latter part of the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> Thus it may be seen that as the last century drew to a close there were many besides Unitarians who had begun to work in this field.

The plan carried out in this dissertation has been to treat individual contributors rather exhaustively. I have given in almost every case a short biographical sketch of the Unitarian in the hope that such a procedure would provide the proper background for a complete understanding of the person as well as of his or her work. In the case of Ralph Waldo Emerson, however, this has been omitted, due to the familiarity of most readers with his career.

I felt it necessary, in addition, to provide some sort of background for the study as a whole, in order to place the work in its proper perspective, to show some of the European contributors to the Study of Religions and their relationships in time to those of America, and to indicate the unique features of America which had a bearing on the work done here; for these reasons the chapters on "Background" and "Cultural and Geographical Factors" are included at the beginning.

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Henry Jordan, *Comparative Religion--Its Genesis and Growth*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), 462-476.

It is needless to say, perhaps, that at almost every point in my researches new areas for investigation were disclosed, and it was with the greatest amount of restraint that I limited myself to the strict boundaries which I had set up at the beginning of this work. Having caught a glimpse of the extent to which this examination might have gone had there been no restrictions, it is with a feeling of incompleteness that this study is presented. However, perhaps the material which is given here will provide the stimulus or at least be the starting place for a more thorough and complete investigation, and in that case I shall feel that this endeavor has been well worth the time and effort given it.



## CHAPTER I

### THE BACKGROUND

American Unitarian interest in religions other than Christian was not without its backgrounds any more than any intellectual effort is ever entirely new. It had its roots in various efforts made throughout the history of the western world to know and understand the beliefs of different peoples and nations. This search has been surrounded for centuries by the barriers of dogmatism and the prohibitions of institutionalism, but it has gone on--slowly at times, and then again more rapidly. Some introduction, it is felt, is necessary before launching upon the details of investigations into this field made by particular liberals here in this country, and for that reason at the opening of this study consideration is given to the gradual awakening of interest in other religions in Europe.

The ancient thinkers, whether priests or philosophers, were inclined to be quite indifferent in their attitudes toward other religions. The Greeks, for example, took it for granted that in other countries the religions should be different from theirs; for they accepted the fact that as customs differed in foreign lands, so also should religions be different from their own. However, it is important to realize that indifference may not always mean disinterest. For example, in the case of the Greeks there was always a good deal of curiosity. This is one reason for the rise of philosophy in Greece; the endless search for knowledge and wisdom. Occasionally a Greek writer would be attracted by the varying customs of other peoples and attempt to



describe them, just as Herodotus did. There was no prohibition by the religion of the Greeks against such description, and this is really what made for their indifference. While their attention was excited by various cult practices and while they devoted much time and effort to delineate the foreign rites and ceremonies, make comparative studies and philosophic syntheses, they never felt that other beliefs were a threat or even a challenge to their own. Where no religious strife existed and where there was no effort to proselyte on their part or on the other hand to defend their particular religion they could quite justifiably and confidently affect an indifference toward other beliefs, while at the same time allowing full play to their curiosity. But this curiosity in the early period was not pursued with enough zeal to create anything like systematization. The Hellenes were content to color their work with fanciful etymologies, allegorical interpretations, and the substitution of personal impressions for facts.<sup>1</sup>

The prophets of Israel, despite the fact that they condemned other cults, were really not interested in denouncing these from a philosophical point of view, but because their own people had gone over to these cults, and the prophets were interested in maintaining a pure Jehovistic adherence on the part of all Jews. Thus the only attention they paid to other religions was to levy prohibitions upon their own people against apostacy. Their treatment in regard to them was not historical or scientifically descriptive in any sense of the word.

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<sup>1</sup>A. Eustace Haydon, Man's Search for the Good Life (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), p. 14.



The later Greek philosophers of Hellenic times, before the power of the East was felt due to the incursions of the Persians, did not seem to be concerned about the necessity of taking other religions into consideration in their attempts to form a theological system. After this there were some attempts made to recognize in the gods of other nations, particularly Egypt, certain manifestations of their own gods, and at times there was even some scepticism voiced as to the reality of other deities, but, all in all, these efforts were more or less cursory and feeble. Plato and Aristotle knew about other religions besides those of Greece, and to a certain extent were influenced in their thinking by such recognition; yet even here there was no deliberate effort to affirm or deny those beliefs which other peoples held. They shared the general indifference of their immediate world.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of Plutarch, however, the Greek world had changed perceptibly. Greek religion was declining rapidly; the Orient had been opened first to Greek armies and later to the Romans, and there was considerable intercourse between the two worlds. New ideas and influences played their part in transforming attitudes toward other religions. Plutarch was one of the first Greeks to make a serious effort to study other religions, and in his investigation of the Egyptian religion ("Isis and Osiris") he brought into play the fruits of his use of comparative analyses of other cults. As a result he formulated, as in some respects Plato had also done although in a less satisfactory fashion, a conception of gods and demons and the distinction be-

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<sup>1</sup>Morris Jastrow, Jun., The Study of Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), pp. 1-4.



tween them. Apparently he possessed a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the various religions of his time, for his work on Egypt shows that he was well acquainted with its mythology and also that he knew the principal tenets of Zoroastrianism. Another indication of his widespread understanding of other faiths was his attempt to show how symbols in religion are often mistaken for realities. But Plutarch's endeavors, were, of course, quite primitive. He used very superficial resemblances as his means of comparison and identification, and there is a very noticeable simplicity and naïveté in regard to his etymologies.<sup>1</sup>

During this same period there was another outstanding scholar in the Hellenistic world who interested himself in other religions. This was Lucian, who is purported to have written an essay on the Syrian goddess, "De Dea Syria." He, like Plutarch, was one of the first writers to have any conception at all of the significance of the problem of the multitude of religions in the world.

The Stoics were interested in delineating a principle which underlay, they believed, the gods of all the religions in the world, and they called this principle the "Logos." All the religions of the world, they maintained, have but different names for the same god, and, consequently, the Stoics advocated that every religion should accept every other with perfect tolerance. However, even with this philosophy they failed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the religions which were included in the world of their times and knowledge. They did not approach the problem from a comparative or even an historical viewpoint.

In the merging of the Hebraic and Hellenic streams of culture in the first and second centuries A.D. it would seem that

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 5.



an interest in the examination of different religions should have been one outcome, but even in Philo, who was perhaps the best representative of this synthesis, there was no indication of any interest in religious phenomena, as such, to any great extent, except where the differences between religions had a particularly practical effect on the issues of the day, such as the attempt on Philo's part to blend Platonic thought with Mosaic precepts. He contended that the similarities of Pagan and Christian ideas were the result of plagiarism on the part of the Pagans of Moses and the prophets.

The Romans felt their superiority over other peoples far too strongly ever to accord other religions the place which they rightfully deserved. Tacitus, in his Germania, shows this tendency, for he, and this is true also of Lucretius, felt that there was little to learn from the despised "barbarians." Both of these writers, for example, saw the sublime monotheism of the Jews only in the light of a superstition and failed to give it their sympathetic consideration.<sup>1</sup>

The Neo-Platonists like the Stoics had a theory which accounted for the differences in religions, but they were not more interested in these various religions for their own sakes than were the Stoics. For them all religions are paths to the same goal; a mystic union with the ultimate single divine reality.<sup>2</sup>

The early Christians in their supreme loyalty to Jesus Christ were interested chiefly in defending their belief against accusations, and saving souls. However, when later they gained the power of state they became strong enough to challenge the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Haydon, op. cit., p. 16.



other religions, such as Judaism, Gnosticism, Manichaeism and Neo-Platonism. In this period of bitter strife no sympathetic consideration of other religions was possible, nor could there be any dispassionate concern over the accuracy of their facts. Christian philosophers explained the similarities in religion as the condescension of God to all people. All people, said the Christians of the fourth century, received divine revelation, but it was only the Jews who got the whole truth. Augustine and the other church fathers attributed the similarities between Christianity and other religions to the efforts of the fallen angels or the devil who copied the true religion in non-Christian cults. Thus later, when articles like rosaries and incense were found in Tibet the Christian proponents could say that the devil taught these practices to the Tibetans. It was incumbent upon the Christians, so they believed, to teach other peoples the only true religion and so defeat the purposes of the devil and the inroads of ignorance. If persuasion was ineffectual then force was the only resort. Augustine, in addition, set the stage for one thousand years of Christian history by saying that the true religion has always been present in the world, but was called Christianity only after Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The evangelical efforts of the early Christian movement provided a basis for a widespread interest in religious phenomena throughout the known world, and Christian theologians spent a great deal of time studying other religions, but the partisan spirit in which they conducted their investigations was not conducive to any appreciative or sympathetic view of the religions

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18. Haydon refers to Augustine, "Retractionum," l. 13. 3, Patrologia Latina, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1878- ), XXXII, 603.



involved.<sup>1</sup> The evangelization of primitive peoples in Europe by the church did not on the whole arouse interest in their cults since they contained nothing which could challenge Christian thinkers. Consequently, whatever interest there had been before in the study of religions died out as Christianity became the great dominant faith of the European continent.<sup>2</sup>

This was the state of affairs throughout the middle ages. The Christians were strenuous in their efforts to remove heathenism altogether by whatever means available, and when faced with the more formidable encroachments of Islam violence in its most reprehensible forms was substituted for the principles of Christian love. Representative of apologetic or rather reconciliatory views were those expressed by Moses Maimonides, the great proponent of Judaism, and the Christian Aquinas. Maimonides put forth the conviction that God permitted his chosen people to believe things similar to pagan cults in order to save them from being lured away into these other faiths. Aquinas and the scholastics held that human nature is similar everywhere and so there are similarities in religious action. All men have a spontaneous knowledge of God; therefore, it is not surprising that they resemble each other in their statements. But although these two philosophers...."gave their respective religions intellectual dignity in the presence of Greek philosophy," they contributed little to the understanding of various religions.<sup>3</sup>

By the 13th century classical lore had returned to the west via the Moslems and the Jews. The three great contenders

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<sup>1</sup>Jastrow, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup>Haydon, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 22.



for superiority were Christianity, Judaism and Mohammedanism. The effort to propagandize their particular beliefs gave rise again to an atmosphere in which there was interest in other religions on the part of each of these, because in polemicizing it was necessary for the scholars to be well acquainted with the religion they were attacking. Of course, it will be recognized immediately that there was in this no spirit of objectivity or sympathy out of which could come a really thorough appreciation of the merits of each religion.

A more important trend toward an understanding of other religions arose, however, in the same century. This was due to the spread of the Mongol Empire which opened routes to the Far East. The Church with its interest in propagation of the gospel of Christianity sent missionaries to China, India and other Oriental lands who soon provided the West with a large amount of material in respect to the different religions of these remote places. Travellers, in addition, spread reports of the Eastern religions and the culture of the Orient as a whole. While no great impulse resulted which would stimulate deep research into the characteristics of non-Christian faiths, there was, nevertheless, a certain increment added to the consciousness of the Western intellect which was a preparatory step towards later development. On the whole, though, at this time scholars were pursuing the older practices of defense and apologia through the channels of philosophy, along with denunciations of other religions. One solitary figure stands out in this period precisely because his attitude towards his studies was of such different tone. This was the Moslem scientist, al-Biruni. He approached the study of religions objectively and scientifically, gathering his materials not only by word of mouth and observation, but also by the use of



original literature for a basis on which to give an unprejudiced account and comparison of those variant beliefs which fell under his examinations. Al-Biruni was, then, "...one of the first to carry over the scientific spirit into the study of religions."<sup>1</sup>

With the advent of the Renaissance period a new atmosphere began to pervade Europe. Man's place in this world was given a more adequate explanation, and men began to look upon their existence here as not such a gloomy affair as it had all along been represented to them. In this new environment of rising interest in life as a good thing to be lived, the dogmatic attitude of the authoritarian church in ruling the every movement of its adherents began to lose place and there was a turning away from the once-hallowed ascetic temperament. These influences were still present, but the new spirit of inquiry into the more secular affairs wore the garments of the older tradition more lightly.<sup>2</sup>

The rising Humanism glorified man and the ancient classical authors. It also glorified the attitude of love of beauty, laughter and the eager joy of living. There was an acceptance of fate. These things stimulated the Humanists and broke the bonds of tradition. Those of the 17th century believed that all religions were fundamentally one; all were adequate for salvation; all were inspired; all were essentially monotheistic. All this was important to a new attitude which was to arise regarding the study of other religions. As the new scholarship spread across Europe there were many works produced about the gods and cults of other religions and the habits and customs of foreign nations, besides some general works on religions of other peoples as special

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



studies.<sup>1</sup> However, it was long before religious phenomena could be studied as such; that is, without connection with Christian apologetics, or without the comparative approach, endeavoring to show the superiority of the Christian over other religions. At least ninety-five per cent of the works within even the last fifty years in our own time have been written from the viewpoint of apologetics. Therefore, how much more were those of the 16th and 17th centuries likely to pursue this method of analysis is readily understandable. This can only lead to the conclusion that those investigators were not really interested in true histories of religions but in apologies for Christianity.

The Reformers showed that all things essential in popular Christianity were taken over from pre-Christian religions in their effort to challenge the authority of the Church and break down barriers. Needless to say, they went further than they thought they were going, for in doing this they were also smashing the bases on which their own church stood. But in their attitude toward other religions, the reformers did not actually represent a different approach, for Luther was as condemnatory of Islam, for example, as any of those Christians who preceeded him. Mohammed to Luther was an incarnation of the Devil. Moreover, the increased interest in the study of Hebrew which the Renaissance encouraged failed to promote a true understanding of the Jewish people on the part of Christian scholars and masses. To them the Jews were still "stiff-necked" in opposing the Christian propagandists with their message of the gospel of love.<sup>2</sup> Because of the failures of any study of other religions to promote a spirit

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Jastrow, op. cit., p. 8.



of tolerance and understanding, there are many scholars who wonder if conditions would not have been better had no study of other religions been made at all under Christian auspices. Says Jastrow,

It would have been better if with the sentiments prevailing till the middle of the eighteenth century, less attention had been given to the study of religions, for such study, inspired by hatred and carried on with bitter prejudice, merely furnished additional fuel for the fires of religious fanaticism.<sup>1</sup>

A new vista for an objective interest in non-Christian religions came with the advent of the eighteenth century. In England, Germany and France there arose in reaction to the practices and the dogmatic narrowness of the traditionalists a spirit of rationalism which respected no traditions--even those of the imposing structure of the Christian Church, and its most sacred precepts and possessions of divine revelation were repudiated and questioned along with the rest. The idea of religion was treated by the philosophers as something owned by man as a natural characteristic, an innate trait, or the very conception of religion itself as a valuable factor in man's cultural existence was allowed no validity whatsoever. This rationalistic school began in England, and both moderate and radical elements found first expression there. Deism with its statement by Lord Herbert of the five inborn ideas of all natural religion may be said to have represented the moderate approach, while those like John Toland the more radical.<sup>2</sup> Toland, for example, was apparently the first to insist that all religions, save those of the savages, are to be explained as results of autocratic religious leaders.<sup>3</sup>

As rationalism spread to the continent the more radical views found reception in the writings of Voltaire, Diderot,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Haydon, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

<sup>3</sup>Jastrow, op. cit., p. 15.



D'Alembert and others. These rationalists were militant against the Catholic Church, Lutheranism, and Calvinism. This extreme position was in several ways as destructive of tolerant and sympathetic investigation of religions as was that which impelled the dogmatists of Christianity to assert one true religion and by this an exclusion of the validity of any other faith. Neither view when pushed to its limits offered a fertile ground for an unbiased approach to a comprehensive study of religions. These philosophers at once in their violent reaction to the acerbity of dogmatic theology ascribed, as had John Toland, in England, all religion in its refinements to the evil machinations of a priesthood endeavoring to maintain special interests and to subject the masses of the people to an autocratic rule through its use of superstitious rites and doctrines. "All religious rites were the deliberate invention of a body of men, and could have neither sanction nor authority in the eyes of the people who exercised their<sup>1</sup> reason." The extreme rationalists thus were as intolerant of the various religions of the world as were those whom they opposed. Scepticism instead of being a constructive force became the corollary of a different sort of fanaticism. In another sense, too, this radicalism was a deteriorating influence, for whereas traditional Christianity had maintained throughout its history a lofty destiny for humanity, this attitude inferred an infantile and puerile mankind which would allow such a deception to persist for so long a time. Neither dogmatist nor rationalist was prepared to conceive religions as the product of an evolutionary movement, and the radical rationalists in their sweeping condemnation of all sorts and types of religion except those existing in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 9.



savage states were blinded to those contributions of richness and value which religions in their progress have, despite perversions, bestowed upon all races and peoples.<sup>1</sup>

But despite all its faults rationalism had made some very important contributions. Since it was founded upon the new Locke-Newton empiricism there appeared a new attitude and a new evaluation of facts and experience in intellectual investigations. The new science was bound to affect the study of other religions just as it had affected the researches into other fields of endeavor. These scientists had affirmed the existence of a universal law working throughout nature. Such a law was new. It was a far cry from the type of law which had up to this time been accepted--that of divine revelation. This natural law when applied to religion supplanted much which heretofore had been ascribed to revealed law alone. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of this new trend of thought in its implications for the study of religions. Hume was one of those who asserted that that in revealed religion which could not be reconciled with Natural Religion must be attributed to human sources for which no authority could with reason be claimed. But the rationalists, themselves, really contributed but little to the actual study of religions. They lacked the historic sense which would enable them to see how revealed religion might also follow regular laws as much as did Natural Religion.<sup>2</sup>

There were, in addition, other factors which made for a different approach to other religions and new opportunities for their study. The new intuitionism in philosophy paved the way for the idea of universality of religious ideas which was felt in the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-17.



earlier Deism and in the later Transcendentalism. Mention has been made above of the new importance of factual evidence. The new atmosphere made for a certain repugnance toward, or, at least, a turning away from the purely speculative a priori assumptions and Christian biases toward the materials of other religions. It demanded an objective consideration of these materials as testimony to the validity of other systems of religion in themselves without resort to a criteria founded upon tradition's dogma. The days of critical strife within Christianity itself had been well nigh spent in fruitless controversy and the new age was weary of old battles. Consequently other religions were approached with a more expansive spirit of tolerance and understanding.<sup>1</sup> Besides this there was the desire to connect various manifestations of other religions. The first effort of this sort was made before the period under consideration here, but it indicated the trend. In 1653 Alexander Ross in England had published his The Religions of the World, and while this book was written from the viewpoint of Christian prejudice and intolerance, it nevertheless recognized some merit in the many religions he was dealing with. The next great work of this type was an encyclopaedic compilation called Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the World by Bernard Picart and J. F. Bernard which was a great advance over Ross's study. It attracted a great deal of attention and was translated into English. This book was a basis for modern investigations into religious rites. While it was written from a violently anti-Christian viewpoint and bears the marks of this prejudice, the study is notable for an increased emphasis upon accuracy as to information, and the desire to consider all the phenomena of religion. While

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<sup>1</sup> Haydon, op. cit., p. 34.



an indication of the trend which historic criticism was taking, it errs in misconceiving the real purpose of religious rites.<sup>1</sup>

With an increasing amount of data dealing with foreign beliefs there was available a greater store of knowledge about them which made these religions more understandable to the Christian nations. Then, too, in other fields than religion the scientific method was making great headway and proving its worth. That it might be an asset when applied to the study of religions was at least a possibility. Scholars began to find a fascination in the endeavor to discover the origin of religious practices, deities, and the meaning of the various myths of ancient times. The work of the earlier humanists had provided them with abundant material on mythology of the classical period and there was a constant supply of information about contemporary primitive peoples and their cult practices coming to the attention of students.<sup>2</sup>

Older theories of religious origins began to lose status. At the beginning of the 18th century Banier altered the Euhemeristic theory which had been revived in the latter part of the 17th, toward a more consistent opinion by the use of facts, contending that pagan gods arose not by a conscious imitation of Hebrew figures, but from an original worship of the phenomena of nature which was then transferred to the heroes of their traditions who were by this attribution apotheosized. Christian tradition was still too strong in this period to allow for a complete break with normative concepts of the sanctity of the institution--the ideas of original monotheism and primitive revelation, but the trend from this time on was to consider civilization an outgrowth from savage state, with the exception always of Israelite culture

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<sup>1</sup> Jastrow, op. cit., pp. 22-25.



which possessed an advantage over the others by virtue of the gift of a primitive revelation.<sup>1</sup> Once the idea of an original state of savagery had been accepted in the case of peoples other than the Jews and Christians the way was clear to investigate other religions from the viewpoint of a beginning in the lowly mentality of brutes and then a progressive growth.

From this point on the history of the study of religions in Europe in the 18th century belongs more fully to the history of the philosophy of religions. Prominent names in these studies increase at a rapid rate. Dupuis saw the cult of nature as the origin of all religions, even Christianity, and if it were not for his fatal defect of giving theory prominence over fact he might well have been called the founder of the historical study of religion.<sup>2</sup> DeBrosses attributed the beginnings of religion to the cult of fetishes, rites for the dead and worship of heavenly bodies. Bergier came out with the theory of animism. Count de Gebelin attempted to show that all culture derives from the satisfaction of human needs, including religion, a view which in modern times is accepted by many of the most prominent scholars in this field. Hume ascribed the start of the religious consciousness to the feelings of hope and fear in the effort of men to attain security and happiness in the face of impending natural forces. The later students of this period gave up the idea of simple and single origins of religion in favor of several or multiple factors making for its beginnings and growth. Some, even at this early time, believed that gods were but man's subjective reactions to the manifestations of natures, such as Fourmont. The view became

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<sup>1</sup>Haydon, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>Jastrow, op. cit., p. 36.



more prevalent that religion was not a spontaneous growth but a result of a long period of development; however, the expression of this position at this time was still very vague. Hume was one scholar who in his theory of an early basis of religions in polytheism projected a certain reality into this growing conviction.<sup>1</sup>

Speculation and imagination were by no means absent from the investigations of the 18th century. Along with the more rational and objective studies there was a great deal of allegorical interpretation and fantastic etymologies. But, nevertheless, the scientific viewpoint through all of this was coming more and more to the fore and acquiring more and more respect. The attitude toward an accumulation of all pertinent facts gradually gained greater prestige. Obeisance, however, was persistently given by the majority of writers to the Christian tradition. To a large extent the study of other religions was allied somehow to the effort to show the superiority of the Christian faith and the details of its scriptural records. Writers in this period identified religion almost wholly with worship of the gods. Mythology, too, was considered part and parcel of religion. But despite this, the method of science in the study of religions proceeded apace. Jesuit missionaries in their work with peoples of other faiths and cultures gained a valuable knowledge of their languages and the spirit of their civilizations. Gaubil in China developed a method of high criticism of textual materials and insisted upon its use in evaluation and interpretation. Lafitau, having gained a comprehensive knowledge of the American Indian cultures, led the way in the use of the comparative technique and supplied the formulae upon which later anthropological studies could grow.

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<sup>1</sup> Haydon, op. cit., pp. 32-33.



Fréret, another Jesuit, drew up regulations for the apprehension and ascertainment of historic facts and proposed the application of the total cultural situation of a people in the study of its particular religion. This was a monumental step forward. Bergier also emphasized geography as an important factor in variant practices, and with Fréret urged the employment of comparative language studies in the interpretation and understanding of religions.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the 18th century investigators and philosophers of religion were accepting the prevailing principles of the universal rule of natural law and the idea of progress. Through the rise of the cult of reason and the procedures of the natural sciences the heretofore domination of the supernatural principle in all realms of thinking lost place and in its stead rose the idea of the natural in all phases of culture--politics, economics, and philosophical thought. Natural rights assumed the center of attention in political thinking. This is seen particularly in the drawing up of the American Declaration of Independence and in the thought surrounding the French revolution. Laissez-faire predominated in economics, and the rightful place and the value of man were phrases running throughout philosophical and theological speculations. Soon the German philosophers were to seize upon the conception of a natural evolution of religion and culture as an outgrowth and advance upon the two principles of universal law and progress.<sup>2</sup> Herder, the real founder of the historical school, was to affirm this evolutionary advance toward more ideal cultural forms, and more fully elaborate the contention of Fréret that

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<sup>1</sup>Haydon, op. cit., pp. 34-36.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 37.



religion must be studied in the context of the whole culture of a people. While he will deal too much in generalizations based on insufficient data, his method will nevertheless be distinctly historical. Lessing, too, will share Herder's spirit, for to him the history of religions is the testimony of progress toward perfection in the long march of man. Lessing, despite his inclination to share the current belief in evil priesthood, will emphasize the idea of a progressive revelation as a divine educative method by which man steps from one plane to its next higher stage.<sup>1</sup>

As the 19th century came into view the great steps toward an objective, sympathetic, and scientific examination of the phenomena of religions had been taken. From this point on the process was to move forward in greater refinements of methods already established. The European scholars for the most part must bow to Christian principles and dogmas, but many felt that the more scientific their studies were the more would the results of their studies of non-Christian religions redound to the credit of Christianity.

This, then, was the European intellectual background of American interest in non-Christian religions. This summary has concluded with the advent of the 19th century, for it was then that American thinkers first became interested to any extent in the study of religions other than that of their own culture. To show the progress from this time forward in America as exemplified through the writings of individual Unitarian representative writers and scholars is the endeavor of the present special study.

Before launching this investigation it may be well to

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<sup>1</sup> Jastrow, op. cit., pp. 28-33.



mention briefly influences other than intellectual in order to set the stage more adequately.



## CHAPTER II

### GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS

It has been seen that the study of religions was not a new thing arising solely out of the work of scholars in America but that it had long precedents in the Old World. From time to time the investigations of European students of other religions were brought to this country, and, moreover, the currents of philosophy in Germany, France, and England spread a growing liberalism far and wide. Americans drew from these sources not only their facts but also the spirit in which they worked. However, America's geographical position while in some ways deterring the spread of European knowledge, in other ways offered unusual opportunities for contact at first hand with not only the Europe from which she drew her heritage, but with other lands as well. It is important, in view of later developments in the study of religions to give a brief account of America's unique features.

New England with its many bays and inlets provided perfect harbors for coastwise carrying ships and ocean-going vessels, and this circumstance along with the abundant supplies of lumber and other naval stores soon made ship-building a major industry in early America. Three years after the Plymouth Colony was established ships were being constructed and by 1631 this industry had grown to such proportions that official regulation was necessary. By 1676 Massachusetts alone had a total of 730 vessels. Soon the colonies began to compete with Europe in ship-building and the advantage was with the Americans, for in this early period they could build a vessel for \$34 a ton, while the lowest



cost in Europe was at least \$50.00 per ton. The abundant fisheries off the northern coast gave a tremendous impetus to both the construction of fishing boats and the pursuit of fishing itself. By 1775 a contemporary account listed the number of American ships at 2000 and the number of seamen at 33,000. Whaling, too, enlisted the efforts of intrepid seamen who would brave any gale in this hazardous undertaking. As a result of this industry whale oil was available to the settlers and "under the glow of oil lamps, the cottages of New England farmers were transformed at night from dingy hovels into well-lighted homes where books could be read and games played after the long day's work was done--a novel and appealing scene in the history of agriculture, the beginning of a revolution in culture."<sup>1</sup>

These conditions made trade and commerce a natural following for early Americans, and it was not long before every harbor of the New England coast saw hundreds of "little schooners, sloops, and ketches put forth each year for coastwise traffic, and scores of brigs and ships for England, the Mediterranean, the Gold Coast, and the West Indies.... In 1660 New England traded for a living; in 1760 New England lived for trade."<sup>2</sup> By the latter part of the 18th century adventuring ship-masters sought further and further for opportunities to trade. In 1784 the first American ship reached Canton and it was not long before many vessels thought nothing at all of venturing to the mystical lands of the Orient and the South Seas. The seamen of Salem made a regular

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<sup>1</sup>Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup>Morison and Commager, The Growth of the American Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 63.



practice of these long sailing expeditions, and Boston, in 1790, raised a great celebration upon the return of the Columbia from a round-the-world voyage, laden with tea, silk, and porcelain.<sup>1</sup>

All along the northern coast, especially the New England line, were busy shipyards where, to the music of hammer and saw, rose splendid sloops and schooners--swift and beautiful--big enough to sail any sea and sturdy enough to weather any gale. By the middle of the eighteenth century, New England was launching seventy new ships every year, New York and Pennsylvania forty-five, and the states to the south forty.... New England boys in their early years fled from the stony fields, picked up the art of navigation, saved a little money, and at the age of nineteen or twenty commanded brigs of their own. The sea permitted them to escape from the terrible sermons of the Mathers, to make a fortune, to rise to a social position, and to wear with dignity the title of gentleman. Sea breezes carried them into distant lands where they saw strange peoples and stranger customs which slowly dissolved in skepticism the faith and usages of their fathers.<sup>2</sup>

The influence of many contacts with other peoples living in distant countries where customs and habits were so different was bound to provide an atmosphere congenial to curiosity about other lands and this curiosity was later to lead to a real interest in the study of other nations and their particular religions. For in these busy ports of New England and the Coast was a cosmopolitan environment. The larger seaports could claim that among their populations were residents of many different ethnic backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Besides this there strode through the coastal towns sailors on leave from their ships fresh from exciting voyages far beyond even the imaginations of their fathers. In their common conversations the phrases "up the Straits" or "to Hong Kong and Calcutta" were everyday allusions. One writer says, these towns "seemed closer to Salem or Portsmouth than Hartford or New York

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>2</sup>Charles A. Beard, The Rise of American Civilization (New York: MacMillan Co., 1938), Vol. I, pp. 90-91.

<sup>3</sup>Curti, op. cit., p. 38.



had ever seemed."<sup>1</sup> Into the homes of merchant ship-masters and even the more unpretentious dwellings came articles of luxury and curiosity deep with the tang of oriental mystery and comfort. The more pretentious homes displayed tapestry from England or France, the bedsteads were draped with colorful curtains of Indian linen, "covered with quaint pagodas and figures in turbans." Shawls and silks from Smyrna and Canton put to shame the common homespun. Strange noises came from homes in which there abided monkeys and parrots from tropical regions, eagerly sought after as pets. Coconuts, coral, tamarinds, ginger, Russian kopeks and British coppers were articles proudly possessed by not a few of the inhabitants. At Salem some of the men were in the habit of wearing Chinese gowns to their assemblies and in the dancing schools the horn-pipe was taught. The narrowness and the provinciality of the new world was broken asunder by the travels and exploits of the hardy American seamen. A new attitude of tolerance toward the religious beliefs of other peoples was beginning to spread throughout American coastal towns.<sup>2</sup>

Besides, if their [Bostonian's] minds were closed in political matters, they were more than liberal in religion. They took a lenient view of human nature. Few traces of Puritanism were left among them. Most of them had seen the world, as super-cargoes, merchants, statesmen, students. They had fought with Tripolitan pirates, visited Canton, India and Egypt, brought skins in Canada and sold them in China, carried ice from Labrador to Java, taken the grand tour to Rome and Naples and had themselves measured by London tailors.... They no longer looked on their fellow-beings with the eyes of Puritan deacons. Indeed, the human nature they found about them, far from being totally depraved, seemed, in the light of these wider circumstances, compared with Chinese coolies and Italian beggars, singularly innocent and good.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1936), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 11.



These were the influences which were before long to usher in the American Enlightenment. If at first view it might seem that this region was a poor place for its beginning because of its strict religious heritage, other factors stand to refute this conception. For the religion dominating colonial life had within it elements which led to the emphasis of reason and the idea of a wide humanity. The farmers in turn did not have the long feudal background of the Europeans; they were small, independent agriculturalists, and most of them had some connection or other with merchants or were businessmen themselves. The urban life of the seacoast towns was a polyglot affair, as has been remarked above. Religious authoritarianism was to totter and fall before the fact of many people of different religious convictions and ethnic traditions living together. In such a situation religious toleration was demanded and was essential.<sup>1</sup>

The forces making for toleration and even curiosity were augmented and stimulated by contributions straight from American ingenuity. For example, take Nathaniel Bowditch. Did not American seamen deserve the best facilities for their long and dangerous voyages? The object was to make sailing easier and surer. If this was done the ship-masters could sail further; they could conquer distance and, as far as commerce and even general knowledge was concerned, bring the East to the West and vice versa. Surely acquaintance with the customs and cultures of Oriental lands must give Nathaniel Bowditch a large measure of praise for its acquirement. Shipping as a supercargo on a vessel bound for Sumatra Bowditch learned astronomy from a study of the stars on clear nights and a studious application to various books on navi-

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<sup>1</sup> Curti, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

gation which he treasured in his berth. He found eight thousand errors in the best book written in England on navigation, and determined to write his own rules for the guidance of skippers to make their voyages less perilous. For one hundred years after the publication of The Practical Navigator the book was in constant use by every seaman, European or American. It was a classic in its realm and every British ship-captain had to follow it if he wished to compete at all with American sailing ships. So accurate was Bowditch's knowledge of sailing that he was able to the great wonder and amazement of all, to bring his own ship safely to the Salem wharf in the midst of a blinding snow-storm. Every sailor he taught became a ship-captain in his own right. With treasures such as the Practical Navigator America moved ahead on her own toward an enlightenment which came later in time than the European, it is true, but which was in its way unique and individual.<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, Bowditch was a Unitarian, for according to Alexander Young, "In his religious views, Dr. Bowditch was from examination and conviction a firm and decided Unitarian."<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, Bowditch procured his copy of Newton's Principia from Dr. William Bentley, minister of the East Church in Salem, who is treated in the next chapter.<sup>3</sup>

Nowhere along the New England coast was the cosmopolitan atmosphere as concentrated as at Salem. Nowhere were the local inhabitants made so profoundly aware of other lands, strange and different habits and customs with diverse religious practices as at Salem, Massachusetts. It had been Elias Hasket Derby's three-

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander Young, Discourses on the Life and Character of John Thornton Kirkland and of Nathaniel Bowditch (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1840), p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 40.



hundred ton ship, "The Grand Turk," which stimulated this interest. She had returned to port on May 22, 1787, after an absence of seventeen months and nineteen days and the whole town of Salem turned out to greet her. She had been to Canton and the South Seas, and what stories her seamen had to tell! And what prizes of strange goods she bore for the good people of Salem! Stores of silks, teas and Chinese ware soon were distributed among the gentlefolk. The sailors spun long yarns of the curious yellow people far, far across the seas. "The Grand Turk" set the pace. From then the world was the province of the Salem skippers. Past Hawaii, Luzon, Formosa, on to Macao and then to Whampoa before the ancient city of Canton sailed the Massachusetts vessels. The yellow folk with their slant eyes could never seem to get enough of the otter skins brought from far away America. When a few ship-masters discovered that the Chinese coveted the bêche-de-mer, or the sea cucumber, they hastened to the Fiji Islands where they persuaded the natives to gather this article in great lots, boiled and cured these delicacies in rude huts set up on the shores, and sailed away to satisfy the appetites of the anxious Chinese who paid for them at the rate of thirty thousand dollars a year. The housewives of Salem were just as anxious to receive the articles of Chinese export--teas, crepes, silks and nankeens. Soon the trade of these goods ran into the millions of dollars.

In 1789 the brig "Cadet," sailed by Jonathan Carnes, bore into port from a mysterious voyage with a full cargo of pepper, spices, and camphor. Where did he get such treasures? He would not disclose his secret. Only Jonathan Peele, the Salem merchant, was given the precious information and Peele could not begin soon enough to construct an unusually swift vessel, under very particular specifications. Local curiosity was at high pitch. But when



"The Rajah" sailed away in all her glory speculation was rife as to her destination. When the "Rajah" returned a year and a half later she was loaded to the gills with pepper--pepper worth its weight in gold. Would Mr. Peele tell now the source of his fortune in pepper? No, he would keep the secret to himself. Peele made two more immensely successful trips before his competitors discovered that he had found on the west coast of Sumatra this pepper growing in its wild state. For half a century Salem possessed the market on pepper, re-shipping it to all parts of the world at great profit.

Now ships sailed to Batavia and Carthagera, Lagaira and Tranquebar, Bencoolen and Senegal, and the quaint land of Japan. When Captain Devereaux returned from Japan in his ship the "Franklin" he exhibited to the amazed sight of the townspeople cabinets and tea trays of exquisite workmanship, embroidered silks, boxes of birds and painted fans, vases and jade statuettes, precious inlaid tables and carved screens. Many hundreds of articles from the East later found their way into the Peabody Museum and the East India Marine Society museum. Prosperous merchants could open cabinets in their luxurious homes and display pottery jars full of ginger, encased in baskets of split bamboo, blue and white caddies, laden with teas of all sorts, deep, deep vessels containing rock sugar, ivory, jade, and shining black teakwood spice boxes.

Round the smouldering logs in the fireplaces carved with the chisel of the ships' artists, the traveler returning from his voyages told of the dainty ladies of Japan in their kimonos of rich silk made heavy with embroidery; of their glossy blue-black hair framing faces the tint of old ivory, of their long delicate hands, the nails of which shone like jewels. He told of the strange fashion of Japanese men, who wore petticoats like women, who shaved their heads but for a fringe all round which they combed upward and stiffened with gum oil into a little club the size of a man's thumb. He gave word pictures of the temples on the hills against a background of cherry trees that were a wonder to behold--all a mass of blossoms with not a leaf to be seen till after the flowers had dropped like a scented rain. And he told of the mysterious ritual of



lights in honor of the dead, when, after a feast at which the departed were imagined to be present, lamps were placed in tiny straw boats with paper sails, and floated down the river in the night. Hundreds of these frail barques lighted up the waters, till it looked as if the uncanny St. Elmo's fire that used to flicker from shroud to shroud like the souls of the dead, as the sailors believed, had summoned all the departed hosts to this eerie celebration.<sup>1</sup>

The interest of the people of Salem ran high in the adventures of the intrepid, money-making ship-masters. "Captains were requested by their friends to buy such luxuries as red conelian necklaces, camel's-hair shawls, bed-coverings, and pots of preserved ginger. An order for a Sanskrit Bible suggests an interest in comparative religion."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, besides the articles of Oriental luxury a knowledge of Oriental life, customs and thought came to America. Very few of the inhabitants of Salem in the latter part of the 18th century were unaware of the names of foreign places, the customs and manners of non-Christian people, certain improvements which the East had over the West, and a realization that the character of these Easterners was not so barbarian in moral aspect as the narrow Christian viewpoint would like to have it believed. Communication, in addition, was facilitated with those nations which were barbarous or semi-barbarous.<sup>3</sup> Commerce in the Indian Ocean brought further knowledge of the Indian people. Such contacts with old-world civilizations and alien faiths was bound to impress the intelligent merchant-seamen. When the super-cargo of the ship that first entered these eastern waters returned to Salem he voluntarily offered a defense of Mohammedanism. Such influences rapid-

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<sup>1</sup>Frances Winwar, Puritan City, The Story of Salem (New York: Robert M. McBride and Co., 1938), pp. 187-193.

<sup>2</sup>G. Adolf Koch, Republican Religion; the American revolution and the cult of reason (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1933), p. 214.



ly destroyed New England's narrow provinciality, and better minds tore themselves away from the definitive Puritan traditions. Not long after this time Robert Rantoul of Salem was corresponding with Rammohun Roy and discussing the similarities between Oriental and Western faiths. In this manner "The first liberalizing influence upon the old Puritan theology was felt in that community through its navigators, even more than through its critics and theologians. As soon as they came into these warmer latitudes, their crust of prejudice melted and cracked from them like films of ice; and in place of the narrow tradition they carried out with them they brought home the germs of a broad religion of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

One person in particular was completely absorbed and fascinated by the movements of the adventurous mariners. From a tower especially constructed for him by his parishioners, William Bentley, minister of the East Church of Salem, scanned the harbor's mouth for returning vessels and upon seeing the furling sails hastened to inform the town of the ship's approach. He would be one of the first to greet the returning seamen as the ship nestled alongside the Derby Wharf, and as they stepped off decks made intimate by the long voyage, he would ply them with questions about the lands they had visited, the strange people they had seen, their customs and their religious practices. A liberal to begin with, the knowledge he gained by these conversations broadened his sympathy even more. He was well equipped to absorb all that the returning mariners had to tell him, for he was master of more than twenty different languages, and could judge rationally the merits of religion without the drag of a hidebound dogmatism, but through the process of empirical evalua-

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Henry Allen, An Historical Sketch of the Unitarian Movement Since the Reformation (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1894).



tion, and comparative analysis.

He brought these attributes with him to the pastorate of the East Salem church in 1782, where he was settled as colleague to Reverend James Diman. Diman was a strict Calvinist, but as early as 1784 Bentley began to give evidence of the liberality of mind which his background and education had cultivated. When William Hazlitt visited New England in 1784 as a representative of the English Unitarians, Bentley was deeply interested in his teachings. A little later he read the book which Joseph Priestley had written against the idea of the Trinity and affirmed the author's statements as to the validity of the simple Christian doctrines. Throughout his ministry Bentley urged free inquiry in religion, but it was not long after his installation that his preaching took on Unitarian aspects. It is interesting in view of Bentley's contact with those who searched out foreign fields of commerce that the statement has been made claiming him to be the first real New England Unitarian minister.<sup>1</sup> At this period and later Bentley carried on a wide correspondence not only with European scholars, but also with Arabic chiefs in their own tongue. He was stimulated by the atmosphere of this port town to study other religions, and it is mentioned that he knew and appreciated the significance of the religions of India. Morison says that of the 228 heads of families in his church there were thirty-five mariners, fifty-eight master mariners, nine boat or ship-builders, five rope- or sail-makers, and five fishermen. Besides this number others were engaged in occupations which had some tie-up with commerce, or who owned shares in a ship. Also there were

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<sup>1</sup>George Batchellor, Social Equilibrium and Other Problems Ethical and Religious (New York: G. H. Ellis, 1887), p. 267.



some who made private adventures on their own, such as Nathaniel Richardson, owner of the largest tannery thereabouts, who owned four vessels, and his son Nathaniel who died at Malaga at eighteen years of age. "Twenty out of Salem's twenty-four most prominent families, all engaged in foreign trade were Unitarians."<sup>1</sup>

Doubtlessly, these people had been broadened by their experiences and felt the need of shedding their familiar Christian dogmatism for a theology with a more humane and tolerant viewpoint. Hence they sought affiliation with the Unitarian societies as the churches which would permit this more liberal attitude, and, in fact, encourage it. Bentley, from his standpoint, could also cast the seeds of an even greater liberalness into the furrows of this fertile soil of actual experience with the peoples who held to faiths different from the Christians. It was reciprocal education then for both parties--the minister and his congregation. Bentley learned much from his associations with these mariner parishioners of his, and they, in turn, were endorsed in their growing convictions as to the necessity for a greater toleration of different religions by their minister.

If this was the attitude in Salem there must have been people in the other early ports who shared their tendency toward a more liberal viewpoint regarding religion and more appreciation of the extent and characteristics of other religions in those parts of the world which were more remote. Batchellor says that "the two potent influences shaping the ancient Puritanism of Salem into Unitarianism were foreign commerce and contact with the Oriental religions."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Koch, op. cit., p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>Batchellor, op. cit., p. 283.



Bentley was so beloved of his parishioners that they would bring him many objects of curiosity from their voyages. Many of these he gave to the East India Marine Society. He was an early coin collector and his collection was made up of exhibits of money from all parts of the world. He assiduously kept up a diary which remains today as one of the most remarkable journals of early American literature. Throughout this there are remarks about his friends of Salem on voyages to the East. The following is taken from Volume IV of his work [p. 444]:

Mar. 30, 1817--My little friend Charles Forbes recollected me in his letter to his parents. The letter was sent to me. In the letter he informs me that he had visited the South Sea Islands for Sandal Wood. That he saw nothing to admire or prefer in the manners of the Islanders, but they certainly were not so savage as they had been represented. As soon as all fear of superior artifice and power is lost, they admit the utmost confidence and safety. They enjoy a delightful climate and cultivate our vegetables in great perfection. Several Whites have tarried and have married among them and were in seemingly great content. But still his own convictions were against their Society.... Charles speaks particularly of the Sandwich Islands which he visited from the Marquesas.

And in Volume III [p. 386] he writes:

Sept. 29, 1808--This day I saw for the first time specimens of Cotton and Wool Cloths made at the Sierra Leone Colony on the Coast of Africa. It was fine, soft and even. The pieces were 7 1/4 inches wide and six of them sewed together with a colored strip at both ends, the whole pieces being several yards in length. Mr. Richardson who has lately arrived from Africa, says they can raise coffee of the first quality and even superior as he thinks and says to Arabian coffee. Mr. R. presented me with a Bow and quiver full of arrows, shewed me a Fetiche which they use in their religious ceremonies, a powder horn of the Mountain Cow as he called it, the wrinkled horn of the Buck, and such other things as he had brought to America.<sup>1</sup>

Bentley had the greatest respect for those of humanitarian disposition. It was men like him who paved the way for the Unitarian Transcendentalists with their universal ideas of religion.

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<sup>1</sup>The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., 4 vols. (Salem, Mass., Essex Institute, 1914).



When Major General John Fiske died in September, 1797, Bentley spoke these words of a beloved parishioner--one who had been engaged in foreign trade:

He never thought men, who differed from him, were fools or knaves. He had a persuasion that religious opinions depend not on names, but upon sincere inquiry, for their best influence, and that an honest mind might be so circumstanced, as to admit the most absurd doctrines and be uncharitable in the defence of them, while there might be great benevolence in the native purposes of the heart. He therefore loved all men, who acted in sincerity, and never found his own heart less sensible, nor his hand less ready, from the opinions, conditions or prejudices of any men. He loved men, rather than opinions. [He professed the Unitarian doctrine], and he desired to know more of their actions, than of their professions.<sup>1</sup>

There are other factors besides the geographical situation of America which inspired trade and commerce with lands where the inhabitants did not hold the Christian religion. One cannot very well neglect the fact that the colonists after all were living in a land previously possessed entirely by a people uninfluenced by Christianity and whose forms and objects of worship differed in all aspects from those of the traditional Christian faith. There is little doubt that voyageurs, traders, missionaries and adventurers became somewhat well acquainted with the Indian religious practices. But there were few efforts to catalogue or study scientifically these practices. What studies there were always took place upon the background of the Christian missionary effort, or in the attempt to denounce such rites and beliefs as utterly pagan and antithetical to the correct attitude toward the true religion. The French religious orders made heroic attempts to convert the Indian, but there was little permanent effect on the savages. This endeavor, indeed, did introduce a small amount of

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<sup>1</sup>William Bentley, A Funeral Discourse delivered in the East Meeting-House, Salem, on the Sunday after the death of Maj. Gen. John Fiske, who died Sept. 28, 1797 at 53. (Salem, 1797, p. 16 & 24--Quoted in Koch, op. cit., p. 211).



European culture among the natives. Father Meurin, coming to what was later to be Illinois, in 1742, went so far as to study the dialects of the Indians here and even prepared a dictionary, but this did not serve to create any profound interest in the religion of the Illinois Indians as such.<sup>1</sup>

The Spaniards on the lower Eastern seaboard made some feeble attempts to work with the Indians, but their impression was transitory and soon faded away. In Texas the Spaniard in 1731 established a dozen Franciscan missions and with the purpose always of Christianizing the aborigines introduced them to textiles, stock raising and agriculture, but even here the result was not lasting. In California the influence of the Spanish missions was greater than elsewhere on the American continent upon the Indian culture, yet their efforts failed to insure a perpetuation of Spanish customs among the Indians when clerical direction disappeared, so that when in the nineteenth century the missions were secularized the Indians returned to their primitive ways of living.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of these Franciscans and Jesuits who established missions in America was always that of the propagation of the Christian faith and the conversion of the natives; however, here and there contributions were made by them perhaps unwittingly to the store of material which later objective historians of religions might employ. Despite the primary purpose of the missionaries they were in a secondary sense scientists, ethnologists, historians and geographers. They reported to their heads on the nature of the languages and culture of the Indians, and often sent

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<sup>1</sup>Curti, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 16.



back rather elaborate maps and descriptions of the land in which they were working. Father Kino, for example, in the Arizona country formulated the vocabularies by which he might translate catechism and prayers into the native Indian tongues. In his Historical Memoirs of Primeria Alta he described accurately and with some objectivity the customs, character, and topography of those parts of the country which he visited. Three Franciscan fathers in the missions of Texas between the years 1745 and 1763 wrote treatises on missionary methods and on the philology and character of the aborigines.<sup>1</sup>

Along the Eastern seaboard the relation of the native Indian to the white settler was bound to be different than that encountered by the French and Spanish Missionaries. These whites were constantly encroaching upon the land formerly held by the Indians and pushing them ever westward. Now and then the Indians would take a stand and bloody warfare would result. This situation in itself was not conducive to an impartial study of the religions of the Indians. Nor could it establish anywhere near the cultural fusion between the two peoples which the French and Spanish missionaries had to a degree accomplished. Failing this the German, Dutch and English could not appreciate that there were different cultural levels and characteristics among the Indians and differences in their religions. The result was that the Indians were looked upon as possessing a unity of culture and this in itself impaired any objective or even scientific investigation of separate traits and practices.

By and large the whites understood little of Indian nature worship, of the poetical Indian love of the land as it was

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



rather than as it might become under cultivation, or of the Indian fondness for symbolizing memorable communal experiences in rituals and ceremonies. Neither did the whites fully understand the Indian concept of passive submission to an irresistible fate, or the curiously dual behavior of the red man when he was with his own kind and when he was with the whites. The stoicism, the sober gloom, and occasionally the dignity attributed by the whites to the Indian did not always correspond to his actual behavior when he was with Indians.<sup>1</sup>

What thinking the white did about Indian religions was conditioned almost entirely by Christian traditional concepts. For example, following Genesis and Exodus, the whites thought of the Indians as having their source in the African Phoenicians or the Asiatic Tartars.<sup>2</sup> More important yet in their attitude toward the American aborigines was the view that all pagan religions were the result of the actions of the devil and the efforts which the people of the Eastern seaboard made to convert the natives was colored by this viewpoint. Missionary efforts had as their prime purpose the exorcising of Satan from these people by introduction to the true faith. Attempts along this line were made in a feeble fashion by the early Virginians; the Swedish Lutherans sent missionaries out to the natives and translated the catechism into the Lenape dialect. The Moravians also made strenuous efforts to bring the Indians into the fold. John Eliot the Puritan divine from England early preached to the Indians and went so far as to translate the Bible into an Algonquin dialect. Jonathon Mayhew, David Brainard, Jonathan Edwards, and Eleazar Wheelock considered it their duty to preach to the Indians and even in some instances to conduct mission schools primarily for the purpose of introducing the savages to the faith of the righteous. In central New York the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 19.



Parts established missions among the Indians. Whatever conversion took place, however, was one-sided. The whites learned little from the Indians which could in any way augment the store of material of other religions which could later be used as reference in a more objective and sympathetic study. In this respect it can be said that the Spanish missionaries made more important contributions than did the English, Dutch and Germans. With the ever-increasing warfare between the red men and the whites for territory or for security the feeling grew among the white people of a definite white supremacy of nature over the Indians. This was a rationale which seems to always accompany the enslavement of one people different in culture and color by another. Soon the Indian was pictured as a depraved being who could never be saved or even civilized by the very fact of his nature. Thus Cotton Mather could characterize him as a "rabid animal, perfidious, bloody, cruel, a veritable devil in the flesh, an agent employed by Satan himself<sup>1</sup> to overcome God's chosen people." With the Indian regarded as an inferior species the sympathy and understanding necessary for an appreciative study of his religions was a foregone impossibility.

In Europe, far removed from the critical strife which the American settlers carried on the Indians, there was a different attitude expressed toward them. The philosophers of the enlightenment with their preponderate view of the pristine purity of the natural state exalted the American savage into a veritable creature of God. He was a highly romanticized figure which the Deists placed upon a pedestal to be adored by all--"a stoical, dignified, unspoiled child of nature...an innately good creature, conditioned by his peculiar environment and susceptible of quickly taking on

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



the white man's virtues." By the latter part of the eighteenth century this view had even penetrated among the intellectuals of America who considered the American Indian the epitome of natural virtue.<sup>1</sup>

Early in the nineteenth century John Pickering, lawyer and philologist, who had mastered twenty tongues, including the principal European and Semitic languages and several Chinese dialects, became interested in examining North American Indian languages, and in his researches upon this subject made contributions which were to lead to a world-wide movement for the study of all the primitive languages.<sup>2</sup> Pickering became the first president of the American Oriental Society.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup>Dunitz & Haycraft, American Authors, 1600-1900 (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1938), p. 618.

<sup>3</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 50.



### CHAPTER III

#### HANNAH ADAMS

The first person in the United States to make any effort toward a systematic study of religions was, singularly enough, a woman, and significantly a Unitarian. Even in Europe with the Enlightenment already passing women had claimed none of the laurels of those who were investigating the field of comparative religions. But here in America, in a remote town of Massachusetts called Medfield, Miss Hannah Adams, a spinster, without formal schooling, having none of the opportunities of the more fortunate scholars, was to gain the distinction of being the first to make an American contribution to this field. Hannah Adams (b. Oct. 2, 1755--d. Dec. 15, 1831) was a member of the distinguished Adams family of New England; a distant relative of the second president of the United States, John Adams. She was the daughter of Thomas Adams, a picturesque character who only rates a claim to memory by virtue of his insatiable lust for books. He had failed completely as a farmer and was no better as a storekeeper. His lack of business acumen was eminently visible in the negotiations which he completed for his daughter by virtue of which she was swindled by her first printer. This bibliophagist acquired local fame by learning to ride his walking pony with his eyes glued to a book, co-ordinating his perusal line by line with the swaying motion of the horse's steps. Some Medfield wit applied to him the nickname of his pet avocation and forever afterwards he was familiarly and affectionately known as "Book" Adams. Hannah



inherited both characteristics of her father. She was extraordinarily incapable of conducting any financial arrangements whatsoever in connection with her publications; moreover she digested every piece of printed matter which encountered her hungry gaze with the same delight and curiosity which had so definitely characterized her father. As a girl Hannah possessed none of that polite sociability which the gentlefolk of New England in those days so assiduously cultivated. Furthermore her health was always poor, and this with her peculiar timidity of personality prevented her from taking part in those endeavors which her intimates and friends made toward acquiring a formal education in school. But her thirst for learning would not go unabated. Fortunately her father boarded several students who took it upon themselves to see that Hannah learned Greek and Latin and the other necessary elements of early American culture. With her natural curiosity she quickly absorbed what they offered and proceeded upon her own to venture deep within the storehouse of academical lore. Later she liked to chastise herself by complaining of her too great fondness for novels, but the testimony of her printed works bears witness against the preponderance of such a suggested tendency. While pursuing her studies under the direction of a student boarder she was introduced to Broughton's Dictionary of Christian denominations which aroused her intense curiosity in this field. But she was filled with disgust at this author's lack of candor in his treatment and as she directed her attention to other works of like sort she found there also much unfavorable sentiment. It is obvious that she had acquired somewhere or other an intimation of the correctness of objective approach, for she discovered them giving the "most unfavorable descriptions of the denominations they disliked, and applying to



them the names of heretics, fanatics, enthusiasts, etc."<sup>1</sup> She resolved therefore that she would make a compilation for herself, stimulated, as she says, "only by curiosity, and never" with the "idea of deriving any profit from it."<sup>2</sup> In her intense reaction to the prejudices and biases of other writers on this subject she determined to formulate several rules for procedure, and these were inserted as advertisements in the various editions of her work. These rules are interesting and instructive in the light of the evolutionary progress of writers in the field of Comparative Religion toward a more and more scientific treatment of religions. The Advertisement reads:

The reader will be pleased to observe, that the following rules have been carefully adhered to through the whole of this performance. 1. To avoid giving the least preference of one denomination above another: omitting those passages in the authors cited, where they pass their judgment on the sentiments of which they give an account: consequently the making use of any such appellations, as Heretics, Schismatics, Enthusiasts, Fanatics, etc. is carefully avoided. 2. To give a few of the arguments of the principal sects, from their own authors, where they could be obtained. 3. To endeavour to give the sentiments of every sect in the general collective sense of that denomination. 4. To give the whole, as much as possible, in the words of the authors from which the compilation is made, and where that could not be done without too great prolixity, to take the utmost care not to misrepresent the ideas.

With the coming of the Revolutionary War her efforts were halted by her extreme destitution and during this period she was forced to weave bobbin lace in order to assure herself of some sort of income. Afterwards, however, because this labor was not to her liking she began to toy with the idea of resuming work on her manuscript to the end that it might perhaps be printed and she gain some pecuniary profit from its sale. Acting upon this

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<sup>1</sup> A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams, written by herself with Additional Notices by a Friend (Mrs. George Lee)--pp. 10-11 (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



she investigated as thoroughly as possible into her scant materials on this subject, going through all the controversial works she could obtain. Of her first adventure in obtaining a printer mention has been made above. The book went to press in 1784 under the title "An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Religions Denominations which have appeared in the world from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Present Day." Although disappointed by the petty compensation from the sale of the first edition she determined to enlarge her work and find a printer who would be more generous. Luckily she was introduced to James Freeman of the King's Chapel of Boston, a Unitarian minister, who with his characteristic magnanimity found a printer for the poor lady who was willing to make a more satisfactory arrangement with her. This edition contained in addition to that previously published "A Brief Account of Paganism, Mahometanism, Judaism, and Deism." Thanks to Dr. Freeman she remarks that "the emolument I derived from it not only placed me in a comfortable situation, but enabled me to pay the debts I had contracted during mine and my sister's illness, and to put out a small sum upon interest."<sup>1</sup>

The compensation from this printing encouraged Miss Adams to venture further into the field of writing and she prepared a "Summary History of New England." This, after much discouragement due to the temporary failure of her eyesight, was printed in 1799. Her History was a poor investment, however, and she determined to print another edition of her compilation of religions, with the addition of about a hundred pages. This appeared in 1801 under the title A View of Religions in Two Parts. Part I. Containing an Alphabetical Compendium of the Various

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 21.



Religions Denominations Which Have Appeared in the World from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Present Day. Part II. Containing a Brief Account of the Different Schemes of Religion Now Embraced Among Mankind, The Whole Collected from the Best Authors, Ancient and Modern.

How extensively this book was read and what interest it aroused is indicated by the fact that the book was reprinted in London in 1805 by T. Williams under the title, A Dictionary of All Religions and Religious Denominations, Ancient and Modern, Jewish, Pagan, Mahometan, or Christian: Also of Ecclesiastical History. This edition contained also an article by Reverend Andrew Fuller called "An Essay on Truth, the Causes of Error, etc." and Miss Adams' article which she had included in her Third Edition entitled, "On the State of the World at Christ's Appearance."

A very interesting sidelight upon the extreme reluctance to produce an entirely unprejudiced, objective work by those Europeans who had passed through the "Enlightenment" is provided by the Preface to the London Edition. This avoiding of what the truly scientific historian of Religions of the present day considers essential is illuminative of the fact that although the American Enlightenment came sometime after its glory had passed in Europe here in America at the turn of the century was a writer who was far in advance of her day. The Preface of the London edition reads:

....Some parts of the accounts, given by the author, of the Eastern Pagan nations, we have omitted, considering the authorities on which they are founded as suspicious. By a close attention to fact in those nations, with which Europeans have lately been in the habits of the most familiar intercourse, we have been compelled to distrust much of the panegyric bestowed upon them by former writers; and to consider it as one of those indirect methods by which deistical



historians, geographers, and travellers, have thought fit to assail the religion of JESUS.

Miss Adams, when she examined this London edition, was on the whole pleased with it, and adopted nearly all of the improvements, including the new title "Dictionary," but she could not find herself able to adopt the foreign editors' wholesale prejudices and for this reason omitted the essay on Truth for which she gave this reason:

Having in the first Edition of my View of Religions prescribed rules to myself, from which I have not knowingly deviated in the subsequent Editions, I have avoided inserting any thing from Dr. Fuller or Mr. Williams, which appeared to me an infringement of these rules.

In commenting upon her statement the editors of the Third London Edition wrote:

This rule, however, not having been adopted by the London Editors, they did not consider themselves bound by it; and could not reconcile themselves to the appearance of a total indifference, as to the truth or falsehood of what they considered the most important doctrines of Divine revelation. They conceived that they conformed to the golden rule of "doing as they would be done by," while they avoided misrepresentations and reproachful terms.<sup>1</sup>

Since her Summary History of New England had profited her little, Miss Adams decided to abridge it for use in schools. Unfortunately Jedidiah Morse anticipated this and the charge of plagiarism was levied upon him by Miss Adams and her friends. She is very reluctant to speak about this misfortune in her Memoirs, viewing it as a very unfortunate occurrence and, having been forced to write a charge against him, in her characteristic charity writes, "I sincerely hope the painful affair may never be recalled to his prejudice."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Preface to Third London Edition, London, printed for F. Westley; W. Simpkin and R. Marshall; and W. Baynes and Son, London, 1823, pp. ix-x.

<sup>2</sup>Memoirs, p. 30.



Miss Adams next ventured to write a History of the Jews beginning with the Restoration down to the 19th century, which was published in 1812. During the time of its writings she became acquainted with Reverend Buckminster who allowed her to use his extensive library and she was "encouraged and animated by his participating in the interest I felt in this extraordinary people."<sup>1</sup>

She also wrote a less important work entitled "The Truth and Excellence of the Christian Religion Exhibited," which contained sketches of lives of eminent Christian laymen who wrote in defense of their religion, and she included in this portions from their writings.

In 1817 the fourth Edition of her "Dictionary" went to press. It was only with the printing of this edition that she was suitably rewarded for the pain and the previous disappointments.

Hannah Adams was a serious and ambitious scholar who endeavored to ascertain what facts there were in the display of religions and their verification. With supreme faith in the truth of the Christian religion she believed the exhibition of the facts of other religions might contribute in a large measure to a stricter adherence in belief to Christianity. Hence she says in the preface to her fourth edition,

Such things [as diverse Faiths] exist, or have existed in the world, whether we know them or not; and the reading of them in the proper spirit may induce us to cleave more closely "to the law and to the testimony."<sup>2</sup>

These concluding words reveal at once the latest persuasion--and, to that extent, the somewhat unscientific attitude of mind--in which this ardent researcher entered upon her work.

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> P. v.



She felt confident at the outset that Christianity could easily be shown to be immeasurably superior to all earlier or contemporary Religions; and it was with the intention of demonstrating the truth of that belief that Mrs. Adams marshalled very skilfully all her carefully accumulated information. It is true that she sought at least, and invariably, to hold the balances impartially; her evidently sincere desire was to discover the truth, and to report frankly just what she found, in each successive case that came under her review; and her unalterable aim, however imperfectly achieved in particular instances, may well be commended to some of her more fortunately situated successors.<sup>1</sup>

So, if we look for pure objectivity in Miss Adams' writings we fail to find it. Let it be said to her credit that she took strides in perfect conformity with some of the more scientific writers of the European enlightenment. It is a very difficult thing to break away from the bonds of tradition, when one's entire cultural surroundings are set in this frame. That Hannah Adams gained some insight into the proper method of approach and made some headway in its application must accrue to her advantage.

Mrs. Adams' Essay was no doubt far from being faultless; nevertheless, everything considered, it was a production that was highly creditable both to its author and to the age that produced it. No book prepared under the conditions which confronted this writer could hope to attain to the standard of achievement which is easily possible even for an amateur of to-day; but he who takes into account the difficulties under which both the compiler and the editors of its successive editions executed their task, and who recalls also the lack of sympathy with which inquirers of this type were in that age generally regarded, will certainly not withhold praise from those who brought to successful completion a really notable undertaking.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact, however, that even an investigation into the so-called "Pagan" or "Heathen" religions might reasonably enough have elicited a certain amount of opprobrium, there is no indication in her Memoirs that such was the case. She appears to have been highly respected and admired by a great number of people.

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan, op. cit., pp. 146-147.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-149.



Her works brought her friends--Freeman, Buckminster, Clarke, etc. She carried on an active correspondence with many learned men and women of her day. A testimony to the high place which she held in the opinions and hearts of many was the annuity given to her which was promoted by Hon. Josiah Quincy, Stephen Higginson, and William Shaw, and just before her death a number of ladies at Salem sent her an annual sum of money "as a testimony of their respect."<sup>1</sup> She received, upon her death, the distinction of being the first person to be buried in Mount Auburn cemetery, and a monument was erected there to her memory. Says Mrs. Lee, writing about Miss Adams:

There seems to be almost a poetical unity in this arrangement; that one who so devoutly "Looked through nature up to nature's God," should be one of the first tenants of a spot, combining so much natural beauty; and which possesses that magnificence of wood and water, which bespeaks it "a temple not made with hands."<sup>2</sup>

[See Appendix to this chapter which gives Bibliographical Notes and remarks about her works.]

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs, pp. 89-90.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 109-110.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE INFLUENCE OF EMERSON

After Miss Adams half a century passed before any American writer attempted a compilation of the sacred writings of other religions. But within intellectual circles forces were gathering which in the last half of the nineteenth century were to produce the first serious studies in America of religions other than Christian. The ground was prepared by the liberalizing of religious ideas through the work of those men who preceded the first American Unitarians, and by those who finally broke away from the more orthodox congregational churches and established a separate denomination. The liberal theological trends in Europe were felt by these pioneers, such as Jonathan Mayhew and William Bentley, who set up their standards for rationalism and free inquiry, and by Charles Chauncy and the Universalists, who protested against the harsh features of Calvinism. The religious strife which followed is known as the "Unitarian Controversy" and lasted roughly from 1815 to 1830. Its result was the organization of a group of people and their leaders into a movement which was to provide fertile ground for investigations into non-Christian religions. For with the proclamation by them of the essential goodness of man's character and the denial of depravity which the Calvinists insisted upon in their principle of election to salvation, and also with the conviction that God is one a more favorable climate to the consideration of other religions was supplied. The theme of universality of the religious spirit and the conception of the



Over-soul which Transcendentalism provided enabled American philosophers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott to see in non-Christian faiths the existence and the beauty of the divine spirit penetrating all races and all peoples. Manifestations, of course, were different, but could be explained by unique traditions. William Ellery Channing, Emerson's great mentor, has been called the first Transcendentalist, and it is largely through his writings and thinking that Emerson was led to his conception of the Over-soul and possibly also to his interest in the writings to be found in Scriptures of other religions, particularly in the Orient.

The place of Ralph Waldo Emerson in a study such as this is that of an instigator or an inspirer in the study of other religions and not as one who made any actual contributions in the form of anthologies, compilations or investigation. The Concord atmosphere created by the early Transcendentalists was congenial ground from which others vitally concerned with the actual study of religions might pursue their separate courses, and of these Transcendentalists Emerson was the guiding light. From this star, then, others could find their way.

Up to his time other religions had been generally disparaged both from an ignorance of the intrinsic values contained in other faiths and from widespread polemical viewpoints in the effort to prove the supremacy of Christianity over the others. But the doctrine of the Over-soul was so expansive that it could embrace within its scope whatever values and contributions were offered by peoples over the face of the earth. There was no bias to this philosophy: Confucianism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, the Mohammedan Sufis--all could find a proper place within its wide province. Its monism made each of these valuable contributors, along with Christianity itself. The spirit behind this eclecticism



forged the way for an acceptance of them in actual study by others who came later. Emerson's work brought them out into the open, cleansed and purified them to orthodox eyes, and they were given as much justification as the age permitted. It was exactly this which gives warrant for consideration of him here. With Emerson the stimulation of the Enlightenment began in America.

Emerson's interest in other religions was confined to Asia, probably because at that time Asia was the only part of the world where Westerners had delved into the treasures of ethnic literature. Anthropology was not at that time a science--had it been Emerson would have no doubt welcomed the contributions of the Malenese or the natives of Australia, and all the rest. Because the only materials that were available were from the Orient he became an Orientalist, finding in the philosophy of the East reflections of that which he himself had worked out. Some excellent studies have been made of Emerson's interest in the Orient; so thorough are they, in fact, that we can do no better than to briefly summarize them in the endeavor to show how Emerson's interest grew and how in his writings he laid the groundwork for later pursuance by liberals of these studies, and provided the inspiration by which the religions of these people were unfolded to Western eyes.

Probably the chief source in preparing Emerson's mind for an acceptance of Oriental literature was the Bible. He, like the others of his time, however, never could think of it as an Oriental product, so firmly was it established as an integral part of Western culture, itself. But, nevertheless, it always lay in the background of his consciousness, providing the psychological foundation for the comprehension of those writings which he would have termed decidedly "Eastern." Therefore Emerson took



the Bible for granted and he never used it as a hunting ground for sparks of Orientalism.<sup>1</sup> Being an adventurer he found Plato congenial to his thinking, and upon his writings, no doubt, built up much of his own philosophy. Its inherent mysticism appealed to him, as did that of the Neo-Platonists, who bridged the gap between the East and the West in the familiar terminology, fully intelligible to Emerson, of the great master Plato, himself. The Neo-Platonists gorged Emerson with the tantalizing mysteries of the Eastern religions, encouraging in him a further venture into the occult of the absolute East.<sup>2</sup>

When Emerson was a boy there were few with a good knowledge of the Orient. Had he lived in Salem his interest might have been stirred much earlier than it was by the marvelous displays in the East India Museum, but he was of Boston and Concord, and there were few travellers to tell the boy of the wonders of the East. Nor were there available books which could unfold its mysteries to his eager understanding. It was a far-away and unknown land. A land he always wanted to explore, but which, as a boy, always was beyond his reach. Of course, there were tales enough, if one wanted to believe them. But the trouble was that these stories were decidedly inconsistent. Once he would hear of the degradation of Oriental life, its miseries and its blindness, and again the veil would be parted to reveal to him Eastern splendor and Romance, and the scent of Arabian spice. Such rumors were unsatisfactory and he was all too ready to accept the dero-

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<sup>1</sup>Frederic Ives Carpenter, Emerson and Asia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), Introduction, pp. ix-x.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. x.



gatory accounts of the Orient. But the tantalizing flavor of the East nevertheless attracted his romantic leanings and lay in the background, ready at any moment to spring forward when knowledge supplied what rumor had intimated. So for thirty years Emerson was unacquainted with the real East. He formulated his philosophy without knowing how it could be affirmed and supported by Oriental literature. In his mature years when this deficiency was supplied to him he eagerly grasped all that the content of this literature could offer and greedily absorbed it. But then it was too late to perform the function of constructing a philosophy for him. He could then merely draw upon it in corroboration for that which he independently and through Greek philosophy had built securely.<sup>1</sup>

Emerson's mind, Carpenter points out, worked slowly. Several repetitions of foreign ideas were necessary before he could assimilate them. Then he would outline the thought in his Journals, and gradually become accustomed to it. Finally, when its content had been fully accepted and absorbed he would enter it into his Essays with new connections and meanings.<sup>2</sup> This is the process by which Orientalism made inroads upon his consciousness. His early schooling had acquainted him with the fact of the existence of an Eastern civilization before that of Europe and this when he was seventeen was acknowledged in his Journals for January, 1820: "The ostentatious ritual of India which worshipped God while outraging nature, though softened as it proceeded West, was still too harsh a discipline for the Athenian manners to undergo."<sup>3</sup> A few months later he attended a lecture

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 12 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), I, 5.



by Edward Everett, and recorded his impressions of it:

As we go back, before the light of tradition comes in, the veil drops. "All tends to the mysterious East." ...From the time of the first dispersion of the human family to the time of Grecian rise, everything in the history of man is obscure, and we think ourselves sufficiently fortunate "if we can write in broad lines the fate of a dynasty."<sup>1</sup>

Such references to the East made him sensitive to it, and before long Emerson was curiously attracted to his classmate Martin Gay, who somehow or other made him think of the Indian practices of self-hypnosis, and he writes in his Journal:

I begin to believe in the Indian doctrine of eye-fascination. The cold eye of \_\_\_\_\_ has so intimately connected him with my thoughts and visions that a dozen times a day, and as often by night, I find myself wholly wrapped up in conjectures of his character and inclinations. We have had already two or three long profound stares at each other. Be it wise or weak or superstitious, I must know him.<sup>2</sup>

If this passage shows nothing else, it indicates that Emerson somewhere had gained information about Eastern practices, and that he was able to use Eastern terminology--a practice which was implemented more and more as his knowledge of the Orient grew.<sup>3</sup>

Later on in his college years he composed a poem entitled "Asia" which shows that all this time he was becoming more and more stimulated by influences which directed his attention to the Orient. He read this poem to a group of literary friends--probably of the "Pythologian Society." But the poem has never been published and is not accessible.<sup>4</sup>

Over a year passed before he inscribed anything with an Oriental tinge into his Journals. Then he wrote what his editors entitled "A Venture in Romance":

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Christy, The Orient in American Transcendentalism, A Study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 66-67.

<sup>4</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., I, pp. 3-4.



I was the pampered child of the East. I was born where the soft western gale breached upon me the fragrance of cinnamon groves, and through the seventy windows of my hall the eye fell on the Arabian harvest. An hundred elephants, appareled in cloth of gold, carried my train to war, and the smile of the Great King beamed upon Omar. But now--the broad Indian moon looks through the broken arches of my tower, and the wind of Desolation fans me with poisonous airs; the spider's threads are the tapestry which adorns my walls, and the rain of the night is heard in my halls for the music of the daughters of Cashmere. Wail, wail for me, ye who put on honor as gay drapery.<sup>1</sup>

The inconsistencies within these lines indicate how poorly the boy so far was tutored in his knowledge of the East, but interest had<sup>2</sup> been aroused.

Aunt Mary Moody Emerson was directly responsible at about this time for stimulated interest on his part in the East. She was a very wise intellectual, free with her advice as far as the Emerson boys were concerned, and felt it her duty to see that they were well educated. Apparently Aunt Mary had been doing some reading in Oriental literature, which she either referred him to, or included mention of in her letters to him. At any rate, a year after he had graduated from College, June 10, 1822, he wrote her:

I am curious to read your Hindoo mythologies. One is apt to lament over indolence and ignorance, when he reads some of these sanguine students of the Eastern antiquities, who seem to think that all the books of knowledge and all the wisdom of Europe twice-told lie hid in the treasures of the Brahmins and the volumes of Zoroaster. When I lie dreaming on the possible contents of pages as dark to me as the characters on the seal of Solomon, I console myself with calling it learning's El Dorado. Every man has a fairy-land just beyond the compass of his horizon...and it is very natural that literature at large should look for some fanciful stores of mind which surpassed example and possibility.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Journal, I, 108.

<sup>2</sup>Christy, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>3</sup>J. E. Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1887), I, pp. 80-81.



Aunt Mary had possibly been reading of the work of Rammohun Roy, the Hindu who had founded a Unitarian Mission in India. It was the same Rammohun Roy with whom William Bentley of Salem had corresponded. Aunt Mary wrote the young Emerson of this Hindu's work, but he had not been particularly interested in it save that he applauded these solitary adventures into Trinitarian "premises."

But despite his seeming indifference some impression had been made upon him. He somehow came into contact with Sir Wm. Jones' translation: "Narayana." Most likely Aunt Mary had mentioned them in her letter to him. Sir William Jones had formed the Asiatic Society of Bengal as an enthusiastic Oriental scholar, and had translated the Laws of Menu. Because of his arduous and rich work in the field of Oriental studies he was called the "father of English Oriental studies."<sup>1</sup> Emerson, at all events, copied some of his lines into his Journal at this time, at the end of a long soliloquy on "God," introducing them in this manner: "I know nothing more fit to conclude the remarks which have been made in the last pages than certain fine pagan strains:

... 'Of dew-bespangled leaves and blossoms bright  
Hence! Vanish from my sight,  
Delusive pictures; unsubstantial shews!  
My soul absorbed, one only Being knows,  
Of all perceptions, one abundant source,  
Hence every object, every moment flows,  
Suns hence derive their force,  
Hence planets learn their course;  
But suns and fading world I view no more,  
God only I perceive, God only I adore!'"<sup>2</sup>

The boy of nineteen had found in Oriental verse the lines which seemed best to conclude his thought,<sup>3</sup> and they made such an impression on him, that he was to quote them again as late as 1856.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Journals, I, 157.

<sup>3</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 5-6.



There is little doubt but that Aunt Mary must be credited<sup>1</sup> with arousing in Emerson an interest in Oriental literature. A year after he had written the above lines in his Journal, in October, 1823, when he was only twenty, he wrote her a letter filled with questions which contain the germ of his Orientalism, and, says Christy, of all his maturest thought.<sup>2</sup> Could the Orientals answer his questions? Perhaps Mary Moody Emerson indicated to him that they could, for it is with this letter that his real interest in Orientalism began. "David Hume, 'this uncircumcised,' ruled the Occidental world with his Sensation philosophy. Where but within himself and in the East was a young mystic to find<sup>3</sup> 'impregnable propositions?'"

But Emerson was not ready yet to admire unconditionally the writers of the East. His position toward the Orient was in these early years at most ambivalent. In the same year he read an article in the Edinburgh Review entitled, "Hindu Mythology" which included this excerpt:

The reader may now have some general conception of the two distinguishing characteristics of Hindu Religion, its quantity and its absurdity, in which there is nothing to match it that is, or ever was, upon the surface of the globe. We shall mention but two more of its prominent qualities; and these are, its cruelty and its sensuality.<sup>4</sup>

After reading this Emerson wrote in his Journal:

That fables should abound, seems not to indicate any especial activity of mind, for, though Greece had many, stupid Indostan

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<sup>1</sup>"Aunt Mary's enthusiasm and the lure inherent in the books of the Orientals eventually vanquished the boy's inherent indifference, as well as his disdain of the sanguine hopes of the men of research. Once he understood the Orientals he never ceased to love them. There were periods when the more immediate problems of life, domestic and national, pushed the books aside, but Emerson always came back to them. And with them he bolstered his faith in transcendental religion." (Christy, op. cit., p. 66).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>4</sup>1818, XXIX, 388.



has more. It may be that theirs are the traditional ingenuity of that supposed ancient parent people of Asia.<sup>1</sup>

And later he added in reference to the same article:

The Indian Pantheon is of prodigious size; 330 million Gods have in it each their heaven, or rather each their parlour, in this immense 'goddery.'

He added some words about "the squalid and desperate ignorance of untold millions who breathe the breath of misery in Asia."<sup>2</sup>

Even Aunt Mary could not break down those early prejudices which were so easily drawn from the temper of his associates and the written material of the times which in Emerson's culture were heavily loaded with Christian prejudice and the common practice of disparaging any religion not Christian, or any peoples not holding the Christian faith. Ignorance of the true conditions and false rumors may have been partly to blame for these attacks, but nevertheless polemic was resorted to wherever opportunity offered itself in order to bolster the Christian position. It is little wonder, then, that Emerson found it so difficult to transcend the current opinions and give full ear to the strains of virtuous conduct for which the Oriental scriptures pleaded. Once he did transcend them he was able to offer to his listeners the positive approach of the transcendentalist. Once emancipated himself, he could present Oriental literature in its own light, that those who followed him might not have to cross the same barriers by which he had so often been turned away.

But during these years his pendulum of opinion regarding the Orient continued to swing. His optimistic nature would break through condemnation of the East to commend it:

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<sup>1</sup>Journals, I, 303-304.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 327.



Nevertheless, Romance is the mother of Knowledge.... If the unknown was not magnified, nobody would explore. Europe would lack the regenerating impulse, and America lie waste, had it not been for El Dorado.<sup>1</sup>

In February, 1824, he entitled a long passage in his Journals, "Asia Origin," and wrote:

Humanity finds it curious and good to leave the armchair of its old age and go back to the scenes of Auld Lang Syne, to the old mansion house of Asia, the playground of its childhood.... It brings the mind palpable relief, to withdraw it from the noisy and overgrown world to these peaceful, primeval solitudes.<sup>2</sup>

In the same passage he exhorted the American:

Strong man! youth and glory are with thee. As thou wouldst prosper, forget not the hope of mankind. Trample not upon thy competitors, although unworthy. Europe is thy father, bear him on thy Atlantean shoulders. Asia, thy grandsire,--regenerate him.<sup>3</sup>

Not long afterwards he wrote the following verses, placing them between a section on "metaphysics," and an imaginary "Letter to Plato":

Sleep on, ye drowsy tribes whose old repose  
The roaring oceans of the East enclose;  
Old Asia, nurse of man, and bower of Gods.<sup>4</sup>

Seemingly Emerson in his but cursory reading of Oriental literature, and influenced by the common prejudice, fluctuated between fascination for things Oriental and an aversion to them. He was not yet strong enough to cast off completely the bonds of current opinion. For the next thirteen years he deprecated the East in almost every reference, however few they were. In 1837, at the age of thirty-four, a passage in his Journals reads:

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<sup>1</sup>Journals, I, 303.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 342.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 380.



I read with great content in the August number of the Asiatic Journal. Herein is always the piquancy of the meeting of civilization and barbarism. Calcutta or Canton are twilights where Night and Day contend. A very good paper is the narrative of Lord Napier's mission to China.... There stand in close contrast the brief, wise English dispatches, with the mountainous nonsense of Chinese diplomacy. The "red permit" writ by the vermillion pencil of the Emperor, the super-African ignorance with which England is disdained as out of bounds of civilization and her king called "reverently submissive," etc. etc.<sup>1</sup>

If during thirteen years there had been little growth in his knowledge of the Oriental religions, customs, and literature, his idealism was becoming well formulated. It was this growth that when once the Orient was opened to his intellect allowed him to be tolerant of it and to understand it. Men in his world were bound narrowly. They could not see beyond their precise boundaries. Emerson grew slowly, but it was a sure growth which in time would enable him to transcend human foibles--to see beyond human weakness. At twenty-one he wrote: "Religion, like metaphysics or physics hath its string of old wives' tales, told to its dishonor in every country; one tissue in Assyria, another at Memphis, another in Gaul, another by the Baltic."<sup>3</sup>

Even at this early age he had clearly discerned the discoloration of opinions by religious bigotry, and how one religion will deprecate another to its own advantage. Later he wrote: "In matters of religion, men eagerly fasten their eyes on the differences between their creed and yours, whilst the charm of the study is in finding the agreements and identities in all the religions of men."<sup>4</sup> Here both the liberal and the transcendentalist is

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<sup>1</sup>Journals, IV, 318-319.

<sup>2</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>Journals, II, 63-64.

<sup>4</sup>Emerson's Works (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1893), X, 226-227.



speaking--he who had transcended all beliefs of his known world--all creeds and sects to find in all of them the essence of the Over-soul. In maturity he hated the current efforts of Christians to belittle the faiths of other nations. "I find something stingy in the unwilling and disparaging admission of these foreign opinions--opinions from all parts of the world--by our churchmen, as if only to enhance by their dimness the superior light of Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

Near the end of this thirteen-year period Emerson began to read more and more in books which concerned themselves with Asia. His interest was increasing. His yearly reading lists clearly indicate that each year he found more palatable material in Oriental literature which corresponded with the philosophy becoming firm in his own mind and which was attractive to his mystical bent.<sup>2</sup>

When, in 1830, he discovered Gerando he wrote in his Journal: "I begin the Histoire Comparée des Systems." This was a four-volume work and it so impressed him that he devoted fifteen pages of his Journals to notes and extracts from it. More than a page covered notes on Oriental systems, and he began the page by saying, "First come the Cosmogonies, Indians, Chinese, Chaldeans," etc. The editor of his Journals, Mr. Edward Emerson, realized that this was an important step in his knowledge and prefaced the section in this manner:

...In 1830 and 1831, Mr. Emerson was introduced by the work of De Gerando to the philosophers of the various schools of ancient Hellas, and also, through him and Anquetil-Duperron, learned something of the teachings of Confucious and Zoroas-

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<sup>1</sup>Emerson, Works, XI, 489-490.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix.



ter. Thus he entered the path that, years later, led to the springs of Religion and Philosophy in the remote past of the Orient.<sup>1</sup>

In 1832 Emerson read and condensed into his Journal a learned article on Zoroastrianism,<sup>2</sup> and in 1834 he read the Chinese "Sheking," and perhaps dipped into an Indian work said to have been written by a "Vyasa," but this is really only a legendary name, meaning "compiler" in Sanskrit. In 1836 Sir William Jones' translation of the "Code of Menu" came to his attention, and at this time also he learned about Confucius and read some of the Chinese sage's extracts.<sup>3</sup>

His first book, Nature, which was published at this time when he was thirty-three, indicates that his philosophy had taken shape; yet there is little in it outside of a reference to the same "Vyasa" whom he described as a philosopher, to show that he had been influenced very much as far as his philosophy was concerned by his Oriental readings. He was slowly absorbing the Orient, widening his tolerance, loosening the grasp of the Christian bias and disparagement of other religions. Gradually he was making the discovery that there was much in Oriental literature which corroborated his own philosophy, and which he, in his characteristic eclecticism could quote and point to as proof that his doctrine of the Over-soul had echoes elsewhere. There are only vague references to the Orient in his Addresses, and the Essays, First Series, which ran through 1841.

In 1837, however, he suddenly seemed to take more interest in the East, as more of these books came to his attention. Between Buddha, Confucius, the Vedas, the Koran, the Vishnu Sarna, and

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<sup>1</sup>Emerson, Journals, II, 329; Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

<sup>2</sup>Journals, II, 473-475.

<sup>3</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 10-11.



several others. As Emerson perused these writings he could see in them the strands of the several threads which more and more convinced him of the universality of religious feeling which perfectly sustained his opinions that the divisions between religions were but superficialities--that underneath all there was a broad commonalty. It became clearer to him that a monism persisted in the world, and that the expressions of different religions were only diverse because of their peculiar modes of exposition of this feeling. Thus in his Divinity School Address of July, 1838, he emphasized the comprehensive moral expressions of men:

Man fallen into superstition, into sensuality, is never quite without the visions of the moral sentiment. In like manner, all the expressions of this sentiment are sacred and permanent in proportion to their purity. The expressions of this sentiment affect us more than all other compositions. The sentences of the oldest time, which ejaculated this piety, are still fresh and fragrant. This thought dwelled always deepest in the minds of men in the devout and contemplative East; not alone in Palestine, where it reached its purest expression, but in Egypt, in Persia, in India, in China. Europe has always owed to oriental genius its divine impulses. What these holy bards said, all sane men found agreeable and true.<sup>1</sup>

Such lines indicate to what extent his eclecticism had drawn him into an appreciation of all religions. But at this time he still retained the impression of Christian superiority over other religions, a feeling which he never entirely lost. Theoretically his doctrine of the Over-soul, for example, could easily parallel the Vedanta, but when he applied it he did so as a Christian. The self-reliance which he preached to American youth and in which he believed so profoundly himself was in application a reliance upon<sup>2</sup> a personal God, even though that God was the wide Substrate. His

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<sup>1</sup>Emerson, Works, I, 126.

<sup>2</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 77.



theological education and his brief experience as a Unitarian clergyman had left their indelible marks. Yet his extensive reading of Oriental scriptures corrected the idea, expressed in the Divinity School Address, of the superior purity of Christian and Jewish writings. When he was an old man he attended a meeting of the "Free Religious Association" which he and his friends had started. When a certain well-known clergyman defended this Christian superiority by quoting several passages in the Gospels and saying unctuously that these could not be matched in the sacred writings of any of the other religions of the world, Emerson rose and with his usual serenity said, "The gentleman's remark only proves how narrowly he had read."

Soon his conception of "Bible" lost its specialized position in Judo-Christian circles as the only revelation or the only valuable contribution to man's vast experience. By 1839 when he was thirty-six he conceived of the Bible as the production of inspiration the world over and wrote these significant remarks in his Journal of that year:

The Bible: The transcendent, I have said, is economy also. Literary accomplishments, skill in grammar, logic and rhetoric can never countervail the want of things that demand voice. Literature is but a poor trick when it busies itself to make words pass for things. The most original book in the world is the Bible. This old collection of the ejaculations of love and dread, of the supreme desires and contritions of men, proceeding out of the reign of the grand and eternal, by whatsoever different mouths spoken, and through a wide extent of times and countries, seems the alphabet of the nations, and all posterior literature either the chronicle of facts under very inferior Ideas, or, when it rises to sentiment, the combinations, analogies or degradations of this.... I have used in the above remarks the Bible for the Ethical Revelation considered generally, including, that is, the Vedas, the Sacred writings of every nation, and not of the Hebrews alone; although these last, for the very reason I have given, precede all similar writings so far as to be commonly called The Book, or Bible, alone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Journals, V, 334-335.



Much reading was yet to be done by Emerson before he could make the remark he did before the Free Religious Society. Seven years later he could write: "Yes, the Zoroastrian, the Indian, the Persian Scriptures are majestic, and more to our daily purpose than this year's almanac or this day's newspaper."<sup>1</sup> At fifty-two he was sure that "The Bible will not be ended until creation is."<sup>2</sup> What could be more valuable, he thought, than to make a life's work out of composing one's own Bible--heeding the call of the spirit within and taking the choicest morsels of wisdom and sentiment from the soul-displaying expressions of men possessed by the religious feeling throughout all ages and all countries.<sup>3</sup> There could be no righteous concern over religious labels or names, for all religions and all scriptures constantly repeat the pervasive movements of the Over-soul. Look to the words of the sages of the East, he could say, for sustenance in periods of despair. He had learned to love all of these writings--"...when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must,--when the sun is hid and the stars withdraw their shining,--we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is."<sup>4</sup>

Each new translation of Oriental books was eagerly seized by Emerson and his Concord friends as they came to the libraries of the great cities. Many were the journeys which they took to Boston and to Cambridge upon hearing that there had been a new arrival. The English, French and German Asiatic Societies had

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<sup>1</sup>Journals, VII, 241-242.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., IX, 15.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., IV, 425.

<sup>4</sup>Emerson, Works, I, 91.



been active in producing these works. The English Orientalists were most widely read by Emerson and the Concord transcendentalists, probably because of their preference for English books if translations were available in this language. But, if not, the Concord men delved into the French with enthusiasm. Strangely enough, however, they were not acquainted with the German translations. Had they been, the whole of Western research into Oriental studies might have been available and used by Emerson and his friends. As it was they read Sir William Jones, who translated the Laws of Menu, and the Sakuntala of Kalidasa. Both of these books came to Concord. The transcendentalists were also familiar with the Hindu epic Ramayana which had been translated by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, sponsored by the English. Sir Charles Wilkens, the first Englishman to acquire a thorough knowledge and mastery of Sanskrit, enriched Concord with the Bhagavadgita. His translation of the Hitopadesa was used by Emerson who culled passages of it to include in his Ethnical Scriptures which were published in the Dial of July, 1842. Probably, also, Emerson was familiar with Wilkens' translation of extracts from the Mahabharata.<sup>2</sup> Horace Hayman Wilson was another English Oriental scholar whose works found cordial reception in Concord. He had published an exquisite translation of the Meghaduta which the Concord transcendentalists cherished with great joy. This book was followed by his Theatre of the Hindus, and not long afterwards the Vishnu, the only one of the greater part of the eighteen Puranas he and a native staff translated which was published, found its way to American libraries, and was used by Emerson.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-41.



Of the French scholars Emerson was mainly familiar with only two--Anquetil Duperron, and Jean Pierre Abel Rémusat. Duperron published a book entitled The Oupnek'hat which was an imperfect Perso-Latin translation of Vedic and Upanishadic material. Despite its failings and impurities it was an important link in the early acquaintance of Western scholars with Hindu thought, and it was not too poor an introduction to Hindu mysticism. This book was cordially received in Concord.<sup>1</sup>

Rémusat who held the Chinese chair at the Collège de France and was a principal founder of the Société Asiatique, worked entirely in the field of the Chinese. He produced L'Invariable Milieu, published in 1817, and the Iu-kiao-li which appeared in 1826. While Rémusat was well known by Emerson and his name often mentioned, his works did not create as great an impression as did the Hindu translations.<sup>2</sup>

The only German scholar who produced books on the East of any importance known in Concord was Von Hammer-Purgstall. His translations of Persian Poetry introduced this field to Emerson and were responsible for Emerson's great interest in it.<sup>3</sup>

1837 marks the year in which Emerson began to take a really serious interest in the Orient. He read more and more Oriental material until by 1845 he was a confirmed Orientalist.<sup>4</sup>

Emerson's constant references to the Neo-Platonists during this seven-year period in his yearly reading lists and elsewhere deserves more attention than has already been given to this subject in order to see just how this stimulated his Oriental

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<sup>1</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>4</sup>See Appendix. II



interest. It is clear that Emerson associated the Neo-Platonists and the Orientalists. He had done much reading in them before his interest in the true Orient was awakened and there is little doubt but that a vital connection exists between them as far as his curiosity is concerned. It must also be remembered that he had done much early reading in Plato and was strongly influenced by him. Plato and Platonism and Neo-Platonism in his mind were one, hence he could give Plato a half-Oriental character in his "Representative Men."

He identified Plato with Platonism, declaring in his essay (on Plato): "....it is fair to credit the broadest generalizer with all the particulars deducible from his thesis." Further, he identified Platonism with Neoplatonism. He credited Plato with the doctrines that the Neoplatonists of Alexandria had deduced from his philosophy, and these doctrines bore a strongly Oriental tinge. They represent, historically, the fusion of Greek Platonism with a mysticism brought from the Orient by way of Alexandria.<sup>1</sup>

By this identification the bridge between the Occident and the Orient was spanned by Emerson, and the groundwork laid for his susceptibility to Oriental mystical flavors and philosophy. He read deeply into Thomas Taylor who had translated the "Chaldean Oracles," attributing them to Zoroaster.<sup>2</sup> Once he had tasted the Orient he was eager to explore it further, and this may in a large degree account for the almost fervid searching into Oriental translations which occurred from 1845 on. In his Representative Men he not only made Plato into a strange mixture of Orient and Occident, but treated Swedenborg in the same way, finding in him the same type of mystical ideology with which his reading in Oriental Scriptures had acquainted him. In addition Goethe, who had, in fact, brought to Ralph Waldo Emerson new Oriental

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<sup>1</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix II.



material in the Kalidasa and some of the Persian Poets, seemed to him to have an affinity with Oriental poetic quality, and he emphasized this characteristic in his book. Representative Men was the first Emersonian production which began to reflect his wide reading in Oriental Literature. There had been little before this to show that he was being impressed by it. In the second series of his Essays, published in 1844, there is little intimation of Oriental influence.<sup>1</sup>

However, in 1845 his Journals were replete with references and quotations from Oriental literature--as many, in fact, in that one year as he had written in all previous years about the Orient. This does not mean, as has been shown, that he was then first becoming acquainted with these readings, but that they were being digested by him and becoming more and more significant as he saw new ways in which to apply the Eastern wisdom and beauty.<sup>2</sup>

If during the years before 1845 Emerson's works and Journals had not displayed much of his growing interest in other religions, there were other signs of it. Whenever either Alcott, Thoreau or Emerson obtained an Oriental translation the three shared it among one another. One of the results of this was a series of articles in the Dial beginning with July, 1842, entitled "Ethnical Scriptures." Once begun there was hardly an issue of the Dial which did not contain sentences from the Orientals. These sentences were taken from the works of those writers already mentioned who belonged to one or the other of the foreign Asiatic Societies. Emerson began the series with

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<sup>1</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 13-17. See Appendix.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.



excerpts from Charles Wilkins' translation of the Hitopadesa,<sup>1</sup> on "Vishnoo Sarma." His introduction to the series is indicative of how great at thirty-nine his tolerance had grown, and how impressed he was with what he had been reading.

We commence in the present number of the printing of a series of selections from the oldest ethical and religious writings of men, exclusive of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Each nation has its bible more or less pure; none has yet been willing or able in a wise and devout spirit to collate its own with those of other nations, and sinking the civil-historical and ritual portions to bring together the grand expressions of the moral sentiment in different ages and races, the rules for the guidance of life, the bursts of piety and of abandonment to the Invisible and Eternal;--a work inevitable sooner or later, and which we hope is to be done by religion and not by literature.<sup>2</sup>

Emerson did not know it at the time, but it was he who above all others stimulated several liberals to attempt just this. The selections which Emerson chose to publish in this issue of the Dial were those which were to his own liking and which corresponded most readily with the philosophy which he himself had constructed. Perhaps these passages were among those which helped "to crystallize the thoughts that were floating within him."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wilkins, The Heetopades of Veeshnoo-Sarma, in a Series of Connected Fables, Interspersed with Moral, Prudential, and Political Maxims. Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1787. "This volume is the chief source of the fables of Bidpay, which Sir William Jones called 'the most beautiful, if not the most ancient collection of Apologues in the world.' Two additional samples of the excerpts which Emerson used may be given:

He, whose inclination turneth away from an object, may be said to have obtained it.

As frogs to the pool, as birds to a lake full of water, so doth every species of wealth flow to the hands of him who exerteth himself."

(This whole quotation is from Christy, op. cit., Appendix, p. 286.)

<sup>2</sup> The Dial, III, 82, July, 1842.

<sup>3</sup> James Eliot Cabot, I, 290.



The following are samples taken from the excerpts in this number of the Dial. The first, it will be noted, expresses well his own sentiment which he called the law of Compensation:

Whatever cometh to pass, either good or evil, is the consequence of a man's own actions, and descendeth from the power of the Supreme Ruler.<sup>1</sup>

The mind of a good man does not alter when he is in distress; the waters of the ocean are not to be heated by a torch of straw.<sup>2</sup>

What is religion? Compassion for all things which have life. What is happiness? To animals in this world, health. What is kindness? A principle in the good. What is philosophy? An entire separation from the world.<sup>3</sup>

In January, 1843, Thoreau drew from Jones' translation of the Laws of Menu for his contribution to the "Ethical Scriptures" in the Dial. In April, 1843, Thoreau used some Confucian passages, and in July, 1843, Emerson is accredited with publishing extracts from the "Desatir" in this series.<sup>4</sup> In October,

<sup>1</sup>Dial, III, 82, July, 1842.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., III, 83.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., III, 85.

<sup>4</sup>Emerson took these quotations from a volume by Mulla Firuz Bin Kaus, called "The Desatir or Sacred Writings of the Ancient Prophets; in the Original Tongue; Together with the Ancient Persian Version and Commentary," (Bombay: Courier Press, 1818). He probably borrowed this book from Alcott who had imported it from England. Later it found its way into the Emerson library. Purporting to be a compendium of the sayings of fifteen prophets the book was proved to be a forgery. Emerson knew this, but it did not bother him. He said:

Nor do I much care for the question whether the Zend-Avesta or the Desatir are genuine antiques, or modern counterfeits, as I am only concerned with the good sentences; and it is indifferent how old a truth is, whether an hour or five centuries, whether it first shot into the mind of Adam, or your own. If it be truth, it is certainly much older than both of us. (Journals, X, 382.)

Emerson heavily underscored many passages in this book, which supplemented or pointed up his own thought. His sentiment is shown in this as by his own words as given above, for "a good sentence was one which echoed his own thought." Since the Desatir was supposed to have been compiled at the time of the Greek occupation of Asia Minor and its philosophical content Grecian as well as Oriental, this fact only emphasizes Emerson's tendency to show little concern over the differences between Greek and Oriental idealism, and to look for the Substratum which both carried. (Christy, Appendix, pp. 306-312).



1843, Thoreau again culled passages from Confucius for his contributions, and in January, 1844 picked some from Buddha, and entitled his selections, "The Preaching of Buddha." The latter were taken from the work of Burnouf, a French translator. The January number of the Dial also included excerpts from the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus. The last of the series was published by Emerson in the April, 1844 Dial under the title "Oracles of Zoroaster and the Theurgists" and for this he took passages from an article in the Monthly Magazine and British Register for 1797, III, 509-26 by Thomas Taylor.<sup>1</sup>

The work of the Concord Transcendentalists in publishing these Oriental Scriptures in the Dial ably assisted in the spread of interest in the Orient which was awakening in New England at this time. It also afforded Emerson the stimulus to study the contents of the books he was using for this purpose as is seen in the marginal lines and underscorings throughout the Desatir, mentioned in the Footnote above, which he made. While he was doing this he became saturated with Oriental phrases and terminology, as with thoughts which amplified and augmented his own.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the contributions to the Dial, there were other signs of Emerson's growing interest in the Orient. In 1841 he at last had the opportunity of sampling Persian literature from Persian poets in a translation by the German Joseph Von Hammer.<sup>3</sup> Saadi and Hafis so impressed him that in the following year he contributed a poem to the Dial entitled "Saadi." He was not

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<sup>1</sup>See G. W. Cooke, An Historical and Biographical Introduction to The Dial (Cleveland: The Rowfant Club, 1902), pp. 196-211.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>Der Diwan von Mohammed Schemsed-din Hafis, (Stuttgart und Tubingen, 1812).



interested in the Persians as poets only, however, but as expressing a philosophy in which he could see his pet doctrines.<sup>1</sup> For example, his emphasis on the necessity of man's self-reliance stands out near the beginning of this poem:

Sadi loved the race of men,--  
No churl, immured in cave or den;  
.....  
But he has no companion;  
Come ten, or come a million,  
Good Saadi dwells alone.<sup>2</sup>

He loved the joyfulness of the Persian poets, their trust in themselves and in the fulness of life. Despite their use of religion for the most part to teach the meanness of the world and to give the power to escape from it, they had found the constructive and positive aspects of religion in the love of beauty, and this appealed to Emerson.<sup>3</sup> What was true of all his reading in the literature of the East was true of the Persian Mohammedans--he read into them what he was looking for and ignored the aspects of their philosophy against which he had inherent prejudice and dislike. He somehow felt they had a close affinity with the Hindus, when really they were much more akin to the Hebraic thought than he realized.<sup>4</sup>

There are also some indications that Emerson may have become acquainted with the Bhagavat-Gita before 1845. Carpenter says that he wrote the following letter to Miss Elizabeth Hoar in 1843:

The only other event is the arrival in Concord of the Bhagavat Gita, the much renowned book of Buddhism [this shows how

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<sup>1</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 171-172.

<sup>4</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 101.



really ignorant he was at that time of Indian religion], extracts from which I have often admired, but never before held the book in my hands.<sup>1</sup>

Emerson had probably read extracts from this book in a sketch of this book by Cousin, which he had seen years before. No mention of it is made in his Journals until 1845. Emerson was one of the few people in America to own a copy of this book, and after he had had an opportunity to peruse it he was thrilled by its contents. Of all the Oriental Books which found their way to Concord this was probably the most influential. The condition of the book after a few years and the number of references made to its use seem to indicate that this copy was handled more than the one in the Harvard College Library.<sup>2</sup> Emerson could not speak highly enough in its praise. He wrote in his Journals:

I owed--my friend and I owed--a magnificent day to the Bhagavat Geeta.--It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us.<sup>3</sup>

Here was a book he could mull over and drink in wisdom of the ages. In it he could find phrases which would sharpen his own, thoughts which seemed to be a recapitulation of those of his own which had by slow digestion been formulated into a philosophy by this time well defined and even expressed. He had the capacity to study the book critically and the willingness to do so, but in typical Emersonian fashion he sought the worthwhileness of its totality--its unity. "Let us not now go back," he wrote,

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<sup>1</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 107-108. He quotes as his authority D. L. Mausby, "The Contribution of Emerson to Literature," (Tufts College: 1911, p. 122). But Christy dates this letter June 17, 1845. Christy, op. cit., Appendix, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup>F. B. Sanborn, "Thoreau and Confucius," The Nation, XC, May 12, 1910, p. 481.

<sup>3</sup>Journals, VII, 511.



"and apply a minute criticism to it, but cherish the venerable oracle."<sup>1</sup> He could see the reflection of his own doctrine of Self-Reliance written in its passages, such as:

The Lord is seated in the region of the heart of all beings . . . . With him seek shelter in every way; by his favor you will obtain the highest tranquility, the eternal seat. Thus have I declared to you the knowledge more mysterious than mystery. Ponder over it thoroughly and then act as you like.<sup>2</sup>

How well this expressed his own feeling that the Over-Soul is in and through all things--from time immemorial into the present and beyond through the future. By seeking what was in one's own heart one could know what the truth was in all exterior appearances. He copied another passage into his Journal from this book as manifesting his own thought that theory and practice were one--that the laws of the world for both the thinker and the doer were the same:

Children only, and not the learned, speak of the speculative and practical doctrines as two. They are but one, for both obtain the self-same end, and the place which is gained by the followers of the one, is gained by the followers of the other. That man seeth who seeth that the speculative doctrines and the practical are one.<sup>3</sup>

Inherently eclectic in its form, the Bhagavat-Geeta could not help but impress the eclectics of Concord. It contained the same questions which they asked and supplied them with practically their own answers. "The Bhagavadgita even approved of the hobbies of Emerson, Thoreau and Alcott--from trances to vegetarianism. No book could have done more. There is little reason to wonder at its popularity."<sup>4</sup> Emerson was to refer to it many

<sup>1</sup>Journals, VII, 511.

<sup>2</sup>Chapter XVIII, 65. Wilkins, The Bhagavat-Geeta (London: Nourse, 1785), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Wilkins, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>4</sup>Christy, op. cit., pp. 28-29.



times in his Journals and in his published works, both specifically by name and by inference. In 1857 he wrote to William Rouns<sup>e</sup>ville Alger thanking him for a collection of the "Poetry of the East" of which the latter was editor, which had been sent by him and added:

The enterprise is very welcome to me, this brave sally into Orientalism, and the attempt to popularize some of its richest jewels. And yet I own to some caprices or alternation of feeling on that subject. When it was proposed to me to reprint "the Bhagvat" in Boston, I shrank back and asked time. It would however be as neglected a book, if Harpers published it, as it is now in the libraries. . . .<sup>1</sup>

There are many who are convinced that Emerson's later poem "Brahma" which stirred up so much controversy by its obscurant nature--obscurant to those not familiar with Oriental thought--had its source in the Bhagavat Gita. Carpenter, in fact, says, ". . . if any idea, or any poem, was ever 'derived' from any literary source, the idea and expression of 'Brahma' was derived purely from the Bhagavat Gita and the Katha Upanishad . . . the form and spirit of it he derived from Hindu literature."<sup>2</sup> Also, in 1845 he copied verses from this book to be included in his Representative Men to be published later. Apparently the thrill of having such a book had not dissipated by 1849, for in that year he wrote to H.G.O. Blake, "Perhaps you will send me in a day or two some hint of your experiences in the Bhagavat Geeta, that will be a text, and will find me in better leisure."<sup>3</sup>

The idea of a unity in the world underlying all ideas and appearances--all form and all matter, found corroboration in this book, and this particularly delighted Emerson. What he had

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<sup>1</sup>Stanley T. Williams, "Unpublished Letters of Emerson," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXVI, 483-484.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>3</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 481.



written in his Journals a few years before 1850 in that year he adapted into his essay on "Plato":

In all nations there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental Unity....This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian Scriptures, in the Vedas, the Bhagavat Geeta, and the Vishnu Purana. Those writings contain little else than this idea, and they rise to pure and sublime strains in celebrating it.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the lines in Emerson's poem "The Sphinx" which was published in 1841 indicate that he might have had Hindu thought in mind when he wrote this poem, and this from the Bhagavat-Gita, although at this time he was not in possession of the book. If the source for the lines and the thought is the Bhagavat he may have taken it from the extracts in Cousin which, as has been noted, he had read. The passage in the Bhagavat Gita reads: "I am the light of the sun and moon....fragrant smell in the earth, refulgence in fire: I am life in all beings."<sup>2</sup> And Emerson's lines are:

She silvered in the moon  
She spired into yellow flame;  
She flowered in blossoms red;  
She flowed into a foaming wave;  
She stood Monadnoc's head.

The similarity in figures is too great not to suspect, at least, that Emerson was inspired by this Oriental book.

It is interesting that Mr. Charles Malloy, to whom Emerson lent his copy of the Bhagavat Gita, said that in it he found the whole of Emerson's philosophy.

In these early years of Emerson's interest in Oriental Literature, there were signs of a growing interest in Arabian

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<sup>1</sup>Emerson, Works, IV, 49-50.

<sup>2</sup>Wilkins, Chap. VII, verses 6-9.



writings, as well as those of the Persians and the Indians. He had read the Arabian Nights over and over again; in Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire he read of the rise and fall of the Saracen Empire, which contained many quotations from the Koran, and details from history. After this he read Ibn Haukal's Oriental Geography drawing from it at least one anecdote. In 1834 he culled a book of Arabian Proverbs for excerpts which he used from time to time. Then in 1837 he read the Historia Muslemica of Abulfeda and in 1840 Ockley's History of the Saracens as his reading lists for those years show. He read Carlyle's essay on Mohammed in Heroes and Hero Worship in 1841 and in 1843 his Journals tell of an interesting conversation with a Mr. Vethake in New York on Mohammed. His essay on Plato, in 1850, cites passages from a book on the philosophy of later Mohammedanism, called Akhlak-y-Jalaly, which his Journals record he read in 1845. But he did not read the Koran until 1855 or later, according to his yearly reading lists. After this time he frequently turned to Arabian books of proverbs, imaginative fiction, and poetry. He found in the Arabian books not only confirmations of his own thought but they appealed to him for their suggestive detail of the habits and customs of the Arabian people--such as heroism, courtesy and hospitality. However, most of all the religious aspect of Arabian literature caught his attention. In his "Man the Reformer" he described how the power of the Saracen's religious ideal promoted the rise of the nation:

Every great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some enthusiasm. The victories of the Arabs after Mahomet, who, in a few years, from a small and mean beginning, established a larger empire than that of Rome, is an example. They did they knew not what. The naked Derar, horsed on an idea, was found an overmatch for a troop of Roman cavalry. . . . The women fought like men, and conquered the Roman men. They were miserably equipped,



miserably fed. They were temperance troops. There was neither brandy nor flesh needed to feed them. They conquered Asia, and Africa, and Spain, on barley.<sup>1</sup>

There were many things which Emerson did not like about Moham-  
medanism, as there were things he did not like about the other  
Oriental nations, but for the most part he found the literature  
congenial.<sup>2</sup>

Emerson's acquaintance with Zoroastrianism began early,  
as has been indicated, and Zoroaster appears more frequently in  
his reading lists than any other figure, save Plotinus, but it  
was not until very late in life that he read any authentic  
books. Not until 1872 do we find the Zend-Avesta listed. Most  
of his references were from the "Chaldean Oracles" or Oracles of  
Zoroaster and the Theurgists, and the "Desatir," or Sacred Writ-  
ings of the Ancient Persian Prophets and both of these are lit-  
erary forgeries. But he knew about Zoroaster before reading even  
these books from the pages in Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the  
Roman Empire which describe the Zoroastrian system of religion,  
as it was accepted by King Artaxerxes. The references he makes  
in 1830 to the Zend-Avesta were only copied from the footnotes  
in De Gerando's summary of Indian and Chinese systems of philo-  
sophy. When in 1832 he filled two pages of his Journals with  
remarks on and quotations from Zoroastrianism, he ascribed them  
to the Histoire de l'Académie des Inscriptions, vol. 37, and  
this source probably gave him a firm foundation of knowledge  
about the subject upon which he could add the pseudo-Zoroastrian  
material which he took from the two books mentioned above. Emer-  
son acquired the "Desatir" in 1843 and it probably came from

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<sup>1</sup>Emerson, Works, I, 215-244.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 197-215.



Lane and Wright's Collection in the Fruitlands' library. Selections from this were printed in the Dial, as discussed above.

While his sources for a knowledge of Zoroastrianism were markedly unauthentic he, again and again, lists Zoroastrianism with his representative lists of the world's religions. He commented on Zoroastrianism in the long soliloquy on comparative religion in his Journals as follows:

A strange poem is Zoroastrism. It is a system as separate and harmonious and sublime as Swedenborgianism--congruent. One would be glad to behold the truth which they all shadow forth. For it cannot but be truth that they typify and symbolize, as the play of every faculty reveals a use, a cause, and a law to the intelligent. One sees in this, and in them all, the element of poetry. . . . the effect produced by making everything outward only a sign of something inward: Plato's forms or ideas, which seem almost tantamount to the Ferouers of Zoroaster . . . . Do we not feel in reading these elemental theories that these grotesque fictions are the gallipots of Socrates, that these primeval allegories are globes and diagrams on which the laws of living nature are explained? Do we not seem nearer to divine truth in these fictions than in less pretending prose? . . .<sup>1</sup>

Even if the books he used for his knowledge of this religion were forgeries, Emerson was able from them to learn more about the Oriental mind. His failure to be scholarly critical about them perhaps is explained by the fact that he really never tried to interpret a system other than his own. When he could find lustres or parables in the Sacred Writing of Other Peoples to augment and illustrate his own thought he was content. He did not approach Oriental scriptures as a scholar, or as a compiler, or a critic, but only as one philosopher looking abroad for that which seemed to him to express his own thoughts more vividly or more poetically than he could himself.<sup>2</sup>

Emerson was never as enthusiastic about Chinese literature and Buddhism as he was about the other religions. Buddhism

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<sup>1</sup>Journals, II, pp. 473-475.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 217-230.



had all the elements for him of the quietism and passivity which so repulsed him, while the Chinese literature emphasized formality and intimated an unprogressive attitude which he disliked. During the greater part of his life, although he read much about them, he was not particularly attracted to them, and only in later life did he set aside his aversion. At first he ridiculed the Chinese, writing in his Journals in 1824:

I laugh at those who, while they gape and gaze,  
The bald antiquity of China praise.<sup>1</sup>

But this was only typical of the general character of his fluctuating opinions regarding Oriental literature in those early days. In 1830 after reading in De Gerando he noted in his Journals that the Golden Rule could be ascribed to Confucius, and that he felt the Confucian Classics contained some valuable definitions on Nature, Law, and Instruction.<sup>2</sup> In 1834, his reading list shows (see above) that he had looked in the Sheking or Chinese book of odes. When in 1836 he read Marshman's Confucius he entered a whole series of Confucius' words into his Journals.<sup>3</sup> His first series of Essays contains a line from Confucius.<sup>4</sup> He was reading an article in the Asiatic Journal in 1837 when he came across that which he described as "the mountainous nonsense of Chinese diplomacy."<sup>5</sup> This sentiment he put into an essay called "The Conservative" which he wrote in 1841. Confucius was read by Emerson again in 1838, and again quoted in his Journals. In 1843 he looked over the Sheking again and in the same year for the

<sup>1</sup> Emerson, Works, XI, 637.

<sup>2</sup> Emerson, Journals, II, 334.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., IV, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Works, II, 159.

<sup>5</sup> Journals, IV, 318.



first time read a complete translation of The Four Books of the Chinese Classics. He found enough in them of interest to cover several pages in his Journals. He felt these to be of such significance that he used some of them in almost every volume of his later Works. But his entries into the Journals never showed that he was completely absorbed by the Chinese as he was by the Hindus. He rarely used their thoughts to amplify or augment his own, but only quoted Confucius, Mencius and others as illustrations, or because he liked their lustral quality. He could agree with the solid ethics of the Chinese, but felt that their very practical ideas did not have the religious element of enthusiasm that he liked and that he found in other Oriental writings. This is not strange when one considers that underneath all Emerson was a mystic. He probably would have shown more interest in Taoism had he ever been introduced to it, but apparently he never came in contact with it.<sup>1</sup> Carpenter suggests also that most likely Emerson felt that the figure of Confucius was too conspicuous in the Chinese scene--he liked rather the writings of those Oriental nations which were expressions of the whole people, more or less--as some of the other folk literature was.

But nevertheless he knew Confucius' worth. In his conservative period he said in his Journals:

Yes; but Confucius. Confucius, glory of the nations. Confucius, sage of the Absolute East, was a middle man. He is the Washington of Philosophy, the Moderator . . . of modern history.<sup>2</sup>

He showed his admiration for Confucius and his feeling of kinship with him in putting this passage in his Journal of 1843:

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<sup>1</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 232-234.

<sup>2</sup>Journals, VII, 126.



Chang Tsao and Kee Neih retired from the state to the fields on account of misrule, and showed their displeasure at Confucius who remained in the world. Confucius sighed and said, I cannot associate with birds and beasts. If I follow not man, whom shall I follow? If the world were in possession of right principles, I should not seek to change it.<sup>1</sup>

These words were written in the days of reform in New England, when Emerson had refused to join his friends in the Woodlands and Brook Farm ventures. Thus Confucius supported his own position.<sup>2</sup>

If there was any corroboration of thought between Confucius and Emerson it was in their observations on men and not in their speculative views concerning the universe. Often in his essays Emerson used Confucian parallels, a good example being the one on "Character." Here Emerson wrote:

The reason why we feel one man's presence and do not feel another's is as simple as gravity. Truth is the summit of being; justice is the application of it to affairs. All individual natures stand in a scale, according to the purity of this element in them. The will of the pure runs down from them into other natures, as water runs from higher into a lower vessel.

Now Mencius, one of the greatest of the exponents of the Confucian school had written:

Water indeed will flow indifferently to the east or to the west, but will it flow indifferently up or down? The tendency of man's nature to good is like the tendency of water to flow downwards. There are none but have this tendency to good, just as all water flows downward.<sup>4</sup>

In view of the fact that both are talking about man's moral nature and use the same metaphor, it is fairly safe to say that Emerson borrowed from the Chinese. Later on, furthermore, in the same essay he quotes directly from the Confucian doctrine of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., VI, 403.

<sup>2</sup> Christy, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Works, III, 95.

<sup>4</sup> Mencius, VI. 1.2.2; Legge, op. cit., II, 271-72; Collie, "Hea Mung," p. 1414: "The virtue of man's nature resembles the downward flowing of water. Men are all naturally virtuous, the same as all water naturally flows downwards."



Mean: "I find it more credible that one man should know heaven, as the Chinese say, than that so many men should know the world."

After this Emerson referred to Mencius' words:

The virtuous prince confronts the gods, without any misgiving. He waits a hundred ages till a sage comes, and does not doubt. He who waits a hundred ages until a sage comes, without doubting, knows men. Hence the virtuous prince moves, and for ages shows empire the way.<sup>1</sup>

Emerson praised the Confucian ideal of courtesy, not because of its formalism, but because it was his fundamental belief that by expressing oneself outwardly in a perfect manner a man can perfect his inward self.<sup>2</sup> Again Emerson and the Chinese were of one mind in stressing the fact that the state rested on a moral basis-- that the aim of the state was the ultimate value of every man in it, potentially and actually.<sup>3</sup> It was this emphasis of the individual, and the responsibility of society toward the individual that brought Emerson and Confucius together.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most general statement, however, which can be made in regard to Emerson's interest in China is that he was

<sup>1</sup>Emerson, Works, III, 110.

<sup>2</sup>Christy, op. cit., pp. 132-134.

<sup>3</sup>"Emerson," says Christy, "was very Confucian in his theories of government. He believed implicitly in the power of the moral sentiment to renovate society. It must be granted that this is too universal a concept to be strictly confined to Confucian and Emersonian thought. The significant thing, however, which cannot be ignored, is that the Yankee Emerson is very partial to Confucian words as an expression of his own thoughts. It would be difficult to reject all the implications of such a telling passage as the following from the essay on "Character":

Confucius said one day to Ke Kang, "Sir, in carrying on your government, why should you use killing at all? Let your evinced desires be for what is good, and the people will be good. The grass must bend, when the wind blows across it." Ke Kang distressed about the number of thieves in the state, inquired of Confucius how to do away with them. Confucius said, "If you, sir, were not covetous, although you should reward them to do it, they would not steal." (Works, X, 120. Emerson took this passage from Analects, XII, 18-19. See Legge, op. cit., I, 122. Christy, op. cit., pp. 136-137.

<sup>4</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 135.



chiefly attracted to it as one of the ancient civilizations of the world. In 1868 he was asked to talk before a banquet given in honor of the Chinese Embassy then visiting in Boston. In this speech he stressed the importance which the Chinese attached to education; extolled Confucius' modesty, which he likened to that of Socrates; in the sage's Golden Rule he saw his own doctrine of Reciprocity; commended this philosopher's Golden Mean; applauded his "unerring insight" in blaming misfortunes on one's self rather than on others; and stated that Confucius' "ideal of greatness predicts Marcus Antoninus." But above all he showed his admiration of China's great age as a civilized nation in the words:

All share the surprise and pleasure when the venerable Oriental dynasty--hitherto a romantic legend to most of us--suddenly steps into the fellowship of nations. This auspicious event, considered in connection with the late innovations in Japan, marks a new era, and is an irresistible result of the science which has given us the power of steam and the electric telegraph. It is the more welcome for the surprise. We had said of China, as the old prophet said of Egypt, "Her strength is to sit still."<sup>1</sup>

There were signs that the "Absolute East" and the progressive West were at long last meeting, and Emerson must be given the credit of being one of the first to acquaint himself with the civilization and thought of this East. As has been indicated there were many things about the East which he disliked, but he read all the literature available on it, and as an interpreter and advertiser of its qualities was the wedge into which more scholarly minds could drive their critical studies and their more scientific researches.<sup>2</sup>

Mention has been made of the fact that the Concord Transcendentalists eagerly welcomed every new Oriental translation

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<sup>1</sup>Emerson, Works, XI, pp. 471-73.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 245-246.



which came to the large libraries. Imagine the joy, then, that reigned among them when Thoreau received from an English friend of his, Thomas Cholmondeley, a whole set of Indian books. Cholmondeley wrote to Thoreau in 1855 the following letter:

Oct. 3, 1855

My dear Thoreau,--

I have been busily collecting a nest of Indian books for you, which, accompanied by this note, Mr. Chapman will send you, and you will find them at Boston, carriage paid (mind that, and don't let them cheat you), at Crosby and Nichols'. I hope, dear Thoreau, you will accept this trifle from one who has received so much from you, and one who is anxious to become your friend and to induce you to visit England. . . . Adieu, dear Thoreau, and immense affluence to you.

Ever yours,

Thos. Cholmondeley.<sup>1</sup>

Thoreau obtained the books at Crosby and Nichols' and brought them to Concord on November 30th. He had prepared a place for them in his small library in the attic chamber. Sanborn who writes about this says that Thoreau had "fashioned for these treasures a new case, out of driftwood that he had brought home in his voyages along the Musketaquid, thus giving Oriental wisdom an Occidental shrine."<sup>2</sup> Writing to his friend Blake on the 9th of December, Thoreau described the books in brief:

I have arranged my books in a case which I made in the meanwhile, partly of river boards. I have not dipped far into the new ones yet. One is splendidly bound and illuminated. They are in English, French, Latin, Greek and Sanskrit. I have not made out the significance of this godsend yet.<sup>3</sup>

And on December 25 he wrote to Daniel Ricketson of New Bedford, saying that he had

. . . . a royal gift in the shape of twenty-one distinct works (one in nine volumes--forty-four volumes in all) almost exclusively relating to ancient Hindoo literature and scarcely one of them to be bought in America. I am

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<sup>1</sup>F. B. Sanborn in his "Thoreau and his English Friend Thomas Cholmondeley," The Atlantic Monthly, LXXII (December, 1893).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.747.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.746.



familiar with many of them and know how to prize them. I send you this information as I might of the birth of a child.<sup>1</sup>

The gift from Cholmondeley to Thoreau meant that the long trips to Boston and Cambridge libraries for these books by Emerson, Thoreau and Alcott were over. It is little wonder that all three were exultant over this windfall. Thoreau cherished them until the day of his death, and when he died in 1862 he left them to his friends. Emerson received as a bequest about twenty of these volumes and read most of them during the remaining years of his life.<sup>2</sup>

From 1845 on Emerson was interested in Oriental literature in every way. He read all he could in other religions, for the greater part of their literature was part and parcel of their religion. Letters to friends discussing new Oriental books increased in number as time went on. For example in 1855 he wrote Lydia Maria Child to thank her for sending him her book on The Progress of Religious Ideas.<sup>3</sup> Her book contained chapters on "Hindustan, Egypt, China, Chaldea, and Persia. He mentioned in his letter, "all the wealth that their 'Contents' and my dipping into the Indian portion assure me. . . ." <sup>4</sup> Particularly between 1850 and 1860 was Emerson immersed in Oriental reading, which a close reading of his essays on the "Conduct of Life" published in 1860 will indicate. His last volume of Essays begins with an essay on "Fate" and concludes with that on "Illusions."<sup>5</sup> Both of

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel Ricketson and His Friends, ed. Anna and Walton Ricketson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1902), pp. 52-53.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 46-48.

<sup>3</sup>Lydia Maria Child, incidentally, was a Unitarian, the sister of a Unitarian minister, who later became a professor in the Harvard Divinity School. American Authors, Kunitz and Haycraft, pp. 146-147.

<sup>4</sup>Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXVI, 482.

<sup>5</sup>See Appendix.



these essays are full of Oriental ideas and replete with quotations from the Scriptures of the East, which he uses to illustrate the very core of this thought. "Indian fables develop the Moham-  
medan feeling for Fatalism, and Persian verses help to bring out the Hindu conception of Illusion." There is no lack of quotations and ideas from the Orient in the essays between these two, either, and especially is this true of his discussions of "Worship" and "Beauty."<sup>1</sup> His poems "Brahma" and "Hamatreya"<sup>2</sup> display how profound his thinking was about Oriental Philosophy and how it added to the content and amplified his own thinking. In 1865 he wrote a "Preface" for the first American edition of Saadi's Gulistan, ascribing to Saadi all that he, Emerson, valued most in Oriental poetry: "(Saadi) has that splendor of expression which alone, without wealth of thought, sometimes constitutes a poet, and forces us to ponder the problem of style."<sup>3</sup> These are only a few examples which might be cited which show to what extent Emerson was influenced by his Oriental readings. Many more might with full justice be given, but the list is too great for a full consideration in this treatise.

It is quite interesting that one so far removed as Emerson was geographically from the East in those days should find so much in its religious writings of such stimulating nature that it could corroborate and augment his own thinking and make valuable contributions to his writings. Emerson did not approach the Oriental scriptures as a scholar. Everything he took and used from them was second-hand material in the form of translations by those

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<sup>1</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 22-24.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix II.

<sup>3</sup>The Gulistan or Rose Garden of Saadi, translated by Francis Gladwin (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865), p. ix.



of the English and French Oriental Societies, as we have seen. He knew no Oriental languages himself. He could not translate directly, so that the question of accuracy in the writings which paralleled those of Eastern writers and poets is really a false issue. Despite this, however, there can be no doubt as to the extent to which he was saturated with the thought and the expression of the East. "It tinged his philosophy, lent beauty to his prose, afforded undulled images to many of his verses, and models for entire poems. There is never a surety that the startling image which so springs the reader's imagination may not be a conscious adaptation for Emerson's own purpose (for example) of a Hindu image."<sup>1</sup> It was because he found the answers to his profound questions that he treasured Oriental thought, and by inner necessity, it seems, he groped for these answers. The Eastern Scriptures became his bibles because they could satisfy his inherent mysticism and at the same time give expression to his own conviction of the truth of the doctrine of the Over-Soul. They did this in a way that no Occidental writings ever could. His love for the Orient and his absorption in its writings was well shown by his letter to Samuel Gray Ward in July, 1840:

In the sleep of the great heats there was nothing for me but to read the Vedas, the bible of the tropics, which I find I come back upon every three or four years. It is sublime as heat and night and a breathless ocean. It contains every religious sentiment, all the grand ethics which visit in turn each noble and poetic mind, and nothing is easier than to separate what must have been the primeval inspiration from the endless ceremonial nonsense which caricatures and contradicts it through every chapter. It is of no use to put away the book; if I trust myself in the woods or in a boat upon the pond, nature makes a Bramin of me presently: eternal necessity, eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken silence,--this is her creed. (Letters from Ralph Waldo Emerson to a Friend, edited by C. E. Norton.)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Christy, op. cit., pp. 179-180.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-63.



But no matter how much Emerson immersed himself in Oriental lore; no matter how much of a "Bramin" he became, he remained an Occidental. He acquired wisdom and spirituality from this literature; he was fascinated by the mystery of the East, so much so that he could call his wife, Lidian "Mine Asia" because she also was mysterious to him:

Can you not show the man of genius that always genius is situated in the world as it is with him?

Lidian Emerson

Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson

I have come no farther in my query than this, when mine Asia came in and wrote her name, her son's and her husband's to warm my cold page.<sup>1</sup>

Emerson could re-interpret the ideas which he gleaned in answer to his deep questions about life from the Oriental books into his poems and other writings. He could achieve "a state of being, rather than a creed" just as the Brahmins had. But all that he took from this reading went through the filter of his own expression and his own thinking and came out in new form though the vestiges of his sources can be seen in the lines he wrote. Consequently those sources that he used sometimes could never be recognized in their original sense, having gone through the mill of his thought. Often Eastern ideas were changed so completely that as written they were contradictory to the meaning which the original authors sought to express. But as such they reflected his own moods, impulses, and spiritual experiences.<sup>2</sup> Thus he could say, "We read the Orientals, but remain Occidental."

It is a mistake to think that Emerson deliberately sought the metaphysics of the East. He was more interested, and his

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<sup>1</sup>Journals, IV, 182.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 25-26.



Concord friends were more interested, in the tones and over-tones of the literatures of India, China and Persia. Speaking particularly, for example, of the Hindus Emerson said, "I want not the metaphysics, but only the literature of them."<sup>1</sup> It was as a religious psychologist and not as a metaphysician that he approached the Eastern religious writings, just as he turned to them as an eclectic and not as a precise scholar.<sup>2</sup> He looked to these writings to find a substrate which he had already through his own thinking formulated into the doctrine of the Over-Soul. Thus his eclecticism Christy describes as "the method of a truce-maker with a sound head and feeling heart, sympathetic with the points of view of passionate adversaries and desirous of bringing about reconciliation and peace."<sup>3</sup>

This survey of Emerson's Orientalism has been an endeavor to show his sympathy and his attitude toward the religious writings of other people and other nations which were not Christian. We have seen that he occupies a singular place in the peculiar study in which this treatise is engaged, for he wrote no dictionaries, compilations, or intensive studies of other religions. Perhaps the only actual contribution he made in this line can be found in Parnassus and in the lectures which he gave to Harvard students near the end of his life. Nevertheless he has been called the founder of the modern school of Comparative Religion in America. Before his time the natives of the East were considered only heathens and their religious literature but foolishness, and for a time Emerson, as we have seen, shared this view.

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<sup>1</sup>Journals, X, 248.

<sup>2</sup>Christy, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. x.



But as he grew in knowledge and as his own philosophy took shape he shed these views and appreciated Oriental religious thought for the values which it contained, becoming extremely sympathetic to it. The transcendentalists, and one must include Alcott and Thoreau, as a whole brought to bear a force which was of the greatest importance in changing the tide of opinion. These individualists, of whom Emerson was the leader, were the levers which pried men apart from the hoary Puritanism and were influential in bringing in a new tolerance and a new understanding of religious beliefs held by people other than Christian. After Emerson had initiated this new point of view the way was cleared for others--more scholarly--to move ahead rapidly, unshackled to a great extent from prejudice and narrow intolerance. Through his influence W.T. Harris and W.H. Channing could present comprehensive lectures on the religious thought of other peoples before the Concord School of Philosophy. Inspired by Emerson to look for the common denominator in all religions, other transcendentalists such as James Freeman Clarke and Samuel Johnson could take the chair in Comparative Religions at Harvard and compile masterly volumes covering the greater part of the field of other religions. Emerson even wrote to Clarke encouraging him in his effort to produce a book on the "Religions of the World."<sup>1</sup>

Even today modern specialists in the study of the History of Religions and Comparative Religions can trace the influence of Emerson into the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> But this point must not be pressed too far. It is well enough to define Emerson's greater influence

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<sup>1</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 247-248; Christy, op. cit., p. 269.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter says, "Once I asked a well-known professor of Comparative Religion in a Western university, what was his attitude toward Emerson, and he answered: "Well I named my first son after him." Carpenter, op. cit., p. 248.



to the 19th century. There he was the reformer and the innovator, the inspirer and the stimulator, the liberator of opinion, destroyer of bias, concorder and peacemaker.



## CHAPTER V

### JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE (1810--1888)

One of the greatest of those who followed in the Transcendentalist tradition was James Freeman Clarke. He was named after his step-grandfather, Dr. James Freeman, the eminent minister of King's Chapel, Boston (1787-1835). Freeman had married the widow of Samuel Clarke. His mother was Rebecca Parker Hull. Clarke was brought up at Newton at Dr. Freeman's home and through this was fortunate enough to have his early education sponsored by his grandfather, who kindled the sparks of intellectual interests in him and showed him the correct methods of study.

I did not know [says Clarke in his autobiography] at the time what a wonderful teacher he was. He anticipated, sixty years ago, the best methods of modern instruction. In the first place he made our studies interesting to us. Next he removed all unnecessary difficulties, and only required us to learn what was essential.... Study was made almost as entertaining as play. Problems in arithmetic and algebra were treated as a kind of game.<sup>1</sup>

Clarke entered the Boston Latin School, where so many other prominent Americans had studied, in 1821, and prepared there for Harvard. He graduated from Harvard with the class of 1829, and immediately went into the Harvard Divinity School, receiving his degree in 1833. Immediately afterward he was ordained in Boston (July 21, 1833). Feeling that he needed experience in the ministry outside of New England and in answer to a call by the American

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<sup>1</sup>James Freeman Clarke, Autobiography, Diary and Correspondence, edited by Edward Everett Hale (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1891), pp. 16-18.



Unitarian Association for missionaries to the western frontier, he obtained a parish in Louisville, Kentucky where he was minister of the Unitarian Church from August 4, 1833 to June 16, 1840. While in Louisville he began his journalistic work as editor of the Western Messenger from April, 1836 to October, 1839. By 1840 he determined to leave the West and return to New England. Arriving in Boston, Clarke decided to organize a new Unitarian Church, which was named The Church of the Disciples, of which he became pastor in February, 1841. This society was as distinguished and as unique as was the Brattle Street Church in giving exceptional recognition to the place of the laity. So constructive and strong was this principle that when in 1850 Clarke was forced to leave the church because of ill-health and after the church property had been sold, the society still continued occasional meetings and communions conducted by lay members, and when Clarke returned in 1854 he was able to take up his work in that church where he had left it. In the interim, however, he made his residence in Meadville, Pennsylvania, having married the daughter of Harm Jan Heidekoper. He enjoyed much intellectual intercourse with the students of the Meadville Theological School, a Unitarian seminary founded in 1844, and was persuaded to take over the ministry of the local Unitarian church. During this time, also, he made a trip abroad, later writing a book about it called Eleven Weeks in Europe.

In 1854 Clarke returned to Boston and resumed his ministry in the Church of the Disciples. While he considered his church the most important of his activities, he did not neglect the broader issues of the day, nor was he an inactive member of the greater community of Boston. From 1863 to 1869 he was a member of the State Board of Education, a trustee of the Boston Public



Library from 1879 to 1888. In addition, he became a non-resident professor in the Harvard Divinity School from 1867 to 1871, and a lecturer on Ethnic Religions from 1876 to 1877. In this school's annual catalogue in 1867 his title stands, "Professor of Ethnic Religions and the Creeds of Christendom."

The outcome of this work which has most interest for the reading public is found in the two books, Steps of Belief and Ten Great Religions, of which he laid the foundations in lectures prepared at this time for his classes. Besides these, which, at the time, were called lectures on "Comparative Theology," he delivered a course on "Christian Doctrine."<sup>1</sup>

James Freeman Clarke was a proponent of a more modern educative method. His style in lecturing was conversational rather than formal, and the lecture hardly ever took more than one-third of the time allotted for the subject. Edward Everett Hale, who edited Clarke's biography, has these interesting words to say which give some indication of Clark's vision:

Mr. Clarke...all his life long, was hoping and planning for a real "University of Theology" in Cambridge, where every important communion should be represented by some one who could state its views, its dogmas and its plans, and even its rituals, in such a way that the members of that communion should think themselves fairly represented. He did not propose to have twenty or thirty professors who had no strong convictions on these dividing subjects. Rather, he wished to have as many as possible who had strong convictions. The man who wrote Ten Great Religions was not the man who would wish to have the professors of a divinity school ignore the existence of all religions except Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

As indicated above, he put to print in enlarged form his lectures on Ethnic Religions as the first volume of his Ten Great Religions, which was published in 1871. In the winter of 1880-81 he gave a course of lectures at the Lowell Institute and these were published soon afterwards under the title of Events and Epochs in Religious History. The following fall found him engrossed in preparing a new set of lectures dealing with Ethnic Religions. As

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<sup>1</sup>Autobiography, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 295.



before, these new lectures were to form the second volume of his Ten Great Religions which was published in 1883. There is little indication either in his various writings or in his autobiography as to the great amount of time and effort which this work must have consumed. For an endeavor of this size required all the facilities of a great scholar and a devotion to work which was, indeed, extraordinary. But it is rarely mentioned. In a letter to W. G. Eliot, his great and good friend, in November, 1881, he merely says: "I have a terrible piece of work before me in writing a new course of Lowell Lectures. It will make the second part of Ten Great Religions, and must be finished by the end of January."<sup>1</sup> And to "A. H. C." he writes in the same month what indicates in large measure the inspiration and the purpose which guided him in his labor: "I wish to show in my Lowell lectures the real religion of humanity, and how God is with all nations, teaching them something of Himself."<sup>2</sup> Hale in going over some of his manuscripts of that period found a loose sheet headed "Before writing the Lowell Lectures." These simple words show his great sincerity and his spirit of humility in approaching this work:

Howbeit, when he, the spirit of truth shall come, he will lead you into all truth. This work of twelve lectures on the religions of the world may do great good or little, as it is done. May I be helped to put out of my heart any wish but this, that the truth of God and the good of man may be served by them. May I be led by the Spirit to say the best and most needed things--whatever may confirm love to God and to man. May I rely on that promise of my master and friend.<sup>3</sup>

His interest in Harvard College being well known, he was made a member of the Board of Overseers during the periods 1863-72, 1873-85, and 1886-88.

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<sup>1</sup>Autobiography, p. 368.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 368.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 368, footnote.

Anna /  
Hudson  
Clark  
his  
wife



In the tradition of Channing and Parker, Clarke was wide awake to the issues of his day. He was active in behalf of temperance, anti-slavery, and woman suffrage. Wherever there was a cause which demanded that justice be exercised, or humanitarian interest aroused, Clarke found himself working. He believed firmly that truth was a universal affair and that men the world over acted from motives which were good. He constantly searched out this good in all people, no matter what their creed, sect, or religion. And this was truly the mark which this man left on the world--that while a loyal Unitarian, he nevertheless had a wide sympathy for other denominations. Wherever men were putting into practice the precepts of Jesus and of the Christian life, he would give them full credit, no matter what their denomination. The Dictionary of American Biography says of him:

The same discriminating insight taught him to discern the best in individuals and to labor to free it from base entanglements. He was a wise, discriminating, sympathetic and irenic friend and teacher; quick to praise, slow to blame; more eager to cherish good than to crush evil; a rare combination of particular loyalties and universal sympathies.<sup>1</sup>

The first volume of his Ten Great Religions is an overall picture of the most important religions of the world. The time had not yet arrived when perfect objectivity had been reached in the treatment of religions other than Christianity, and it is from the Christian point of view that Clarke approaches his work. There is nothing more evident in his writings than the fact that he discarded the older, more intolerant views of other faiths by earlier Christian writers. He believes firmly that Christianity is the best religion; that all other religions are but preparations for the truth which Christianity exemplifies. From the transcendental point of view he can look calmly at these religions, judge them moderately, evaluate the good and the bad features of

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<sup>1</sup>Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1930), Vol. IV, pp. 153-154.



each, and always emphasizing the contributions which they make to a better life. He envisages the time when there shall be but one religion in the world, taking all the best from each religion and putting them into the structure of Christianity which he believes is superior in that it is able to so encompass them in a way which shall be most beneficial to good living. The first chapter in his Volume I of Ten Great Religions defines his purpose and sets the limits to his work. It discusses the pro and con of Comparative Theology, showing just how far his emancipation from earlier prejudices had gone. He thinks of Comparative Theology as really no more than a science of missions, which in its endeavor shows the positive and negative side of each religion, preparing the way for a higher religion. He contends that universal religion must root itself in the "decaying soil of partial religions." Thus the work becomes missionary.

The stature of the man appears in his discussion of the work of Comparative Theology when he says:

The work of Comparative Theology is to do equal justice to all the religious tendencies of mankind. Its position is that of a judge, not that of an advocate. Its first problem is to learn what each system contains; it may then go on, and endeavor to generalize from its facts.... It may be called a science, since it consists in the study of the facts of human history, and their relation to each other. It does not dogmatize; it observes. It deals only with phenomena--single phenomena, or facts; grouped phenomena, or laws.<sup>1</sup>

This is the scientific point of view. If he fails in some respects to correctly interpret a religion, or to omit features of it which compare favorably with those which Christianity supply, he cannot be blamed on account of method or purpose, but more likely because the materials which he used were not complete. It must be remembered that Clarke made no personal investigations of the religions which he discussed. He never went farther in his

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<sup>1</sup>James Freeman Clarke, Ten Great Religions--an Essay in Comparative Theology (Boston: Jas. R. Osgood & Co., 1871), p. 3.



travels than the boundaries of Europe and America. All that he used had been written by other investigators, mostly German, French and English. Few Americans had contributed anything really worthwhile to the study of other religions. His opinions, therefore, were based on the work of others, and it may be accepted that whatever bias they held he was likely to inherit when these prejudices were intricately woven in with facts.

Those prejudices and wrong opinions, when he saw them, were attacked most mercilessly by him. He deprecated those 18th century writers who scorned the worth of other religions and relegated them to mere superstitions or the creation of human fraud--Leland, Whitby, Warburton and even James Foster and John Locke. All these came in for his censure. For he maintained that religions over the face of the earth contained much more truth than error, and he evaluated them by their usefulness to the people they served, and this viewpoint can well be stated alongside the most modern opinions of today.

To ascribe the vast phenomena of religion...to man as their author, and to suppose the whole a mere work of human fraud, is not a satisfactory solution of the facts before us.... Nothing which has not in it some elements of use can hold its position in the world during so long a time and over so wide a range. It is only reasonable to say the same of heathen or ethnic religions. They contain, no doubt, error and evil.... But unless they contained more of good than evil, they could not have kept their place. They partially satisfied a great hunger of the human heart.... A decent respect for the opinions of mankind forbids us to ascribe pagan religions to priestcraft as their chief source.<sup>1</sup>

He felt that all religions have been a craving after God--the effort made to feel after God. In these religions he sees an evolution from worse to better, from ignorance to understanding. Each religion is but a step toward the universal religion which by virtue of its capabilities must be Christianity. If this point

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 6-7.



of view is not true then he thinks that in the religious sphere of life all has been disorder, disunity, chaos; without progress, meaning, or providence.<sup>1</sup>

He is sure of his position in maintaining that Christianity is the superior faith which in time shall supercede and transcend all others, and shall be, in truth, their culmination. Speaking of the late intense reaction to the condemnation of heathen religions which had produced opinions of other religions which equated their value with that of Christianity and even in some instances caused some proponents to set them above Christianity, he is sure that a fair and candid examination and comparison of the systems of religions will reaffirm and establish the superiority of the Christian religion.<sup>2</sup>

The true question is that: Is Christianity, as taught by Jesus intended by God to be the religion of the human race? Is it only one among natural religions? Is it to be superseded in its turn by others, or is it the one religion which is to unite all mankind?... It belongs to this science [Comparative Theology] to establish the truth of Christianity by showing that it possesses all the aptitudes which fit it to be the religion of the human race.... If we can make it appear, by a fair survey of the principal religions of the world, that, while they are ethnic or local, Christianity is catholic or universal; that, while they are defective, possessing some truths and wanting others, Christianity possesses all; and that, while they are stationary, Christianity is progressive; it will not then be necessary to discuss in what sense it is a supernatural religion. Such a survey will show that it is adapted to the nature of man.... If Christianity appears, after a full comparison with other religions, to be the one and only religion which is perfectly adapted to man, it will be impossible to doubt that it was designed by God to be the religion of our race; that it is the providential religion sent by God to man, its truth God's truth, its way the way to God and to heaven.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 14.



Why have the missionary efforts of the Christians failed so far to accomplish that which he believes to be inherent in the make-up of Christianity? Why has conversion been checked? Because, he contends, the Christians have repeated the errors of the Jews and the Mohammedans in seeking to make proselytes to an outward system of worship and ritual, or to make those following another belief subjects to a Christian dogma--they have failed to make converts to an idea and a life.<sup>1</sup> He is interested in the inner light of Christianity, its grander aspects in thought and the practice of the good, the complete life, rather than in its vain displays of ecclesiasticism and parade. Instil into all peoples the ideology of the Christian faith; show them how to live as Jesus lived, and they will see the immense superiority of Christianity. Christianity is the catholic religion, best fitted to serve the needs and desires of all men. He was never one to support Christian errors--he deplored them, but take the best in Christianity; make of it a universal religion, a true transcendentalism; show its spirit, its categorical instruction to lead humanitarian lives, and in this form it will be capable of adapting itself to every variety of the human race.<sup>2</sup>

This shows how much of a transcendentalist Clarke was. Face the facts, array them one alongside the other, examine, compare them, be objective about it. Only one result can come from this method. Christianity will be certified as the one religion which can gather into its fold the various endeavors of all mankind, and, never halting, progress toward the complete life.

There is little doubt that James Freeman Clarke began

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 21.



with his Christian presuppositions, as did many others in his time. He believed firmly that his study would affirm these presuppositions. That he arranged his facts to point toward this conclusion must not be gainsaid, but that he was taking great strides toward 20th century objectivity, can also not be denied. He sums up his introduction in this manner:

When we have completed our survey, the results to which we hope to arrive will be these, if we succeed in what we have undertaken:--

1. All the great religions of the world, except Christianity and Mohammedanism, are ethnic religions, or religions limited to a single nation or race. Christianity alone (including Mohammedanism and Judaism which are its temporary and local forms) is the religion of all races.
2. Every ethnic religion has its positive and negative side. Its positive side is that which holds some vital truth; its negative side is the absence of some other essential truth. Every such religion is true and providential, but each limited and imperfect.
3. Christianity alone is a fulness of truth, not coming to destroy but to fulfill the previous religions; but being capable of replacing them by teaching all the truth they have taught, and supplying that which they have omitted.
4. Christianity, being not a system but a life, not a creed or a form, but a spirit; is able to meet all the changing wants of an advancing civilization by new developments and adaptations, constantly feeding the life of man at its roots by fresh supplies of faith in God and faith in man.<sup>1</sup>

After this introductory chapter on the aims and the conclusions of the Comparative method he enters upon his treatment of different religions. Each chapter is devoted to a particular religion--Confucius and the Chinese, Brahmanism, Buddhism (which he calls the Protestantism of the East), Zoroaster and the Zend Avesta, the Gods of Egypt, the Gods of Greece, the Religion of Rome, the Teutonic and Scandinavian Religion, the Jewish Religion, and Mohammed and Islam. At the end of each chapter he discusses the relation of that particular religion with Christianity where there may have been or was some connection between that religion

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.



and Christianity. In a final chapter he takes up all the loose ends and gives the results of his survey, showing how Christianity is distinguished by being a pleroma or fullness of life. He sums up the characteristics of all the religions he has treated and compares their practices, doctrines, and ideals with those of Christianity, affirming that Christianity is superior in its expression of that which includes all aspects of life in the most satisfactory manner, in that it is a religion of Progress and universal Unity.

Clark's second volume of the Ten Great Religions, published in 1883, as a result of his Lowell Lectures, is in a different form.

Instead of describing and discussing each of the great faiths of mankind separately, it attempts to show what they all teach on the different points of human belief. We ask what each declares concerning God, the Soul, the Future Life, Inspiration and Art. We consider what is the Idea of God in all religions, and ask how it began and in what way it was developed. In the same manner we seek to trace other phases of the religious life, from their simplest beginnings to their fullest outcome.<sup>1</sup>

Thus he is here treating of other religions more in the manner of the Philosophy of Religion, whereas his earlier volume was chiefly analytical and descriptive. Religion is here approached as a phenomenon to be studied through its various categories. He supports the comparative method by saying that things can be understood better by comparing them with those things which are similar. "We cannot look on any religion with indifference."<sup>2</sup> Does science have a part in the treatment of religions? Clarke affirms that it does:

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<sup>1</sup>James Freeman Clarke, Ten Great Religions, Part II. A Comparison of All Religions (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1883), preface, p. vi.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 2.



...Science in its deepest sense includes all knowledge; it cannot be confined to the study of the outward world. It takes for its domain the whole range of phenomenal existence, the entire circuit of human experience. It is compelled, by the necessity of its nature, to observe and analyze all phenomena, and endeavor to bring them under law.<sup>1</sup>

Doubt and agnosticism is a condition of growth and education,

Clarke maintains:

Blame no honest man for his doubts. Better than blind assent is conscientious denial; better than the passive acceptance of the most important truth is the loyalty to truth which refuses to speak until it can see.<sup>2</sup>

These are wise words, and they make us wonder if Clarke was not ahead of his time, for in the 20th century we have no better judgment to give. But above doubt is belief, and above denial is faith, Clarke continues. Knowledge obtained by a conscientious scrutiny of facts is the food of growth and that upon which faith is founded.

And what must be the method of the Scientific Study of Religion?

If there is such a method, it must consist in the faithful study of the facts, and a careful generalization from those facts. It must be free from prejudice for or against any system. Instead of condemning a religion for its polytheism, it must endeavor to find the source of those practices in human nature, or in the environment. Thus only can we reach what may deserve to be called a "Science of Religion."<sup>3</sup>

This is truly the modern approach to the study of religions. Clarke's work is extraordinary because he set at the beginning of his writings these primary conditions. Moreover he conscientiously followed his method, and if through this practice he could come to the conclusion that Christianity is the superior faith--

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 4.



a Christianity, of course, along transcendental lines--it must accrue to his credit that at least he based his belief on something more than mere tradition or bias.

The Science of Religion is equally hostile to two opposite assumptions. One is the assumption that nothing is real and certain, but that which can be verified by sensible experience. Spiritual experiences are as much facts as those which are perceived by the senses. The other assumption is that of the Theologians, who attempt to build a science of religion on the authority of the Church or the Scripture. There may be, and no doubt is, a legitimate authority belonging to both; but this is not to be assumed, but to be demonstrated. The whole realm of spiritual exercises; the sense of sin and pardon; prayer and its answer; the convictions, trusts, motive-powers, illuminations, inspirations of holy souls, may and ought to be carefully examined, analyzed, and verified. Then it will be seen what part are illusion, and what part reality. When this is accomplished, but not sooner, there will be a Science of Religion.<sup>1</sup>

In his introductory chapter Clarke asserts that Religion is Universal. He discusses the false and the true methods of classification, and defines Ethnic and Catholic religions. In his second chapter he deals with special types and variations, corruptions and degradations from types. Then he devotes a long chapter to the origin and development of religions, dealing with primitive beliefs, a subject which had not been included in his first volume. He shows how one religion has influenced another and sets forth the contention that the first form in which religion was expressed was in the belief in disembodied spirits. He talks about demoniacal possession and exorcism. He sees an evolution in religious development, beginning with animism, and passing on to polytheism, its forms of degeneracy, and the culmination of religious growth in monotheism. In further chapters he takes up the idea of God as expressed in animism, polytheism, pantheism, ditheism, tritheism, and monotheism. From a long discussion then of the idea of God, he passes to the subject of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 5.



soul and its transmigrations in various religions. He reserves a chapter for a treatment of the various conceptions of the origin of the world as narrated by various scriptures of different religions, then he discusses different aspects of prayer and worship in religions, inspiration and art, ethics, ideas of immortality. In his closing chapter, Clarke describes what he believes will be the future religion of mankind. This chapter is very much like the closing chapter of his first volume in which the essence of Christianity is determined as the pleroma or fullness of life, and its characteristic of progressiveness. He believes the religion of the future will be a prophetic religion based on the life and inspiration of Jesus, the greatest of all prophets.

The Appendix to this second volume is very full, including parts of the scriptures of other religions, views upon various religions by contemporary or ancient writers. The Appendix is an instructive and valuable accompaniment to this work which in two volumes has tried to cover so much ground. It supplements both his descriptions and his philosophical contentions.

These two volumes on the Ten Great Religions represent the basic work of Clarke in Comparative Theology. Both are combinations of philosophy and description. Both are written in order to point out the greater value of Christianity over other religions. His accounts draw their conclusions. They are more than merely scientific then, since they are meant to persuade. But by his treatment of different religions he amassed in a convenient manner material from which other scholars could go on even more objectively than did Clarke, and they in turn could draw their own conclusions. This is not to deprecate, in any sense, the value of Clarke's work, for the great mass of writings on religions



of the world has its source in some particular viewpoint which the authors have sought to propound. The facts with which they deal are so closely tied up with very life itself and human life at that, that men with deep faith in a religion, rarely, if ever, turn to stone, or adopt the strict methods of the biologist or the paleontologist. That some can do this to a higher degree than has been done before belongs almost entirely to the 20th century and even then some universal idea of religion is surely in the background of the writer's mind. This is very close, indeed, to what was in the background of the Transcendentalist's mind, who understood and sympathized with other faiths, and maintained his own viewpoint only because he believed it to be the most valuable--not because of the name itself, or the tradition, or the censure of his contemporaries should he depart from that belief.

Outside his Ten Great Religions Clarke wrote little about other religions. In his Events and Epochs in Religious History, published in 1881, as a result of his earlier series of Lowell Lectures, he devotes a chapter to the Buddhist Monks of Central Asia, and monasticism among the Brahmans of India (800 B.C.), and in his chapter on Mystics he describes this phenomenon in India and Persia in a satisfactory manner. Here as in his other works he compares the Buddhists and the Brahmans and his other subjects with Christianity and draws the same conclusions we find in his<sup>1</sup> larger work.

In Nineteenth Century Questions, a volume published posthumously from articles written in the North American Review, Clarke

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<sup>1</sup>James Freeman Clarke, Events and Epochs in Religious History--Being the Substance of a Course of Twelve Lectures, delivered in the Lowell Institute, Boston, in 1880 (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1881).



devotes a chapter to a thorough comparison of the Affinities of Buddhism and Christianity, showing the many analogies which Buddhism has with the Roman Catholic Church and also with the Protestant churches of Christianity. He discusses the defects of Buddhism and shows how Christianity corrects and supplies these deficiencies. Throughout the treatment one catches visions of Clarke's sweet and understanding nature, his tolerant and kindly disposition, his perfect willingness to give credit where credit is due, but criticizes where this criticism can be based in fact. The following passage illustrates his attitude, and as it displays the qualities of James Freeman Clarke, is particularly adapted to close this description of a great transcendentalist writer and Unitarian:

The result, then, of our investigation, is this: There is no probability that the analogies between Christianity and Buddhism have been derived from one another. They have come from the common and universal needs and nature of man, which repeat themselves again and again in like positions and like circumstances. That Jesus and Buddha should both have retired into the wilderness before undertaking their great work is probable, for it has been the habit of other reformers to let a period of meditation precede their coming before the world. That both should have been tempted to renounce their enterprise is also in accordance with human nature. That, in after times, the simple narratives should be overlaid with additions, and a whole mass of supernatural wonders added, as we find in the Apocryphal Gospels and the Lalita Vistara,--is also in accordance with the working of the human mind.

Laying aside all such unsatisfactory resemblances, we must regard the Buddha as having been one of the noblest of men, and one whom Jesus would have readily welcomed as a fellow worker and a friend. He opposes a dominant priesthood, maintained the equal religious rights of all mankind, overthrew caste, encouraged woman to take her place as man's equal, forbade all bloody sacrifices, and preached a religion of peace and good will, seeking to triumph only in the fair conflict of reason with reason. If he was defective in the loftiest instincts of the soul; if he knew nothing of the infinite and eternal; if he saw nothing permanent in the soul of man; if his highest purpose was negative,--to escape from pain, sorrow, anxiety, toil,--let us still be grateful for the influence which has done so much to tame the savage Mongols, and to introduce hospitality and humanity into the homes of Lassa and Siam. If Edwin Arnold, a poet, idealizes him too highly, it is the better fault, and should be easily forgiven. Hero-worshippers are becoming scarce in our time; let us make the most of those we have.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James Freeman Clarke, Nineteenth Century Questions (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1898), pp. 88-89.



## CHAPTER VI

### SAMUEL JOHNSON (1822-1882)

The transcendentalist tradition of freedom and inquiry into the truths of universal religion continued with the work of Samuel Johnson. In the house where Nathaniel Bowditch was born, in Salem, Massachusetts, Johnson's life began on October 10, 1822. He was the oldest child of Dr. Samuel and Anna (Dodge) Johnson. His father was a respected physician of whom it was said, in his native town of North Andover, ". . . the name of Johnson has been one of the most continuously influential in the history of the Andovers." His mother was a member of an old Salem family with which were connected many eminent names in Salem, itself, and in the Commonwealth. What refinement and intellectual powers Samuel, the son, had were the legitimate inheritance of "ancestral intelligence and worth" as were his "graceful speech and manner and great sensitiveness to ideal values and beauty in all shapes and forms."<sup>1</sup>

As a boy in Salem, where, as a matter of fact, he spent the greatest part of his life, he was a leader in sports--healthy-natured and active. There is little doubt that he often visited the old East Indian Museum to gaze in wonder at the strange and curious articles displayed there, brought by ship-captains from the mysterious East. "One is tempted to ask whether it is to that group of painted figures presenting the various castes and trades of India, that we owe the first impulse of interest whose

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Johnson, a Memorial. (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1882), p. iv.



outcome was the "Oriental Religions." Certainly its collections of articles of natural science awoke the study of geology and mineralogy which became his hobby in later years."<sup>1</sup>

At sixteen (1838) he entered Harvard College, a studious, thoughtful, conscientious boy; affectionate and with a strong sense of right. Although he was very popular he was so absorbed in his studies that he had little time for extra-curricular activities. Johnson was interested in the classics, psychology, ethics and English literature. He read Locke and Cousin, learned French under Professor Longfellow. He was later on a fluent reader in German and knew Italian for which he did not care especially, but it is probable that he studied neither of these in college.<sup>2</sup> During his college years Johnson was characterized as a "conservative Unitarian of the school of Ware and Walker,"<sup>3</sup> but later on in life in an address given at the opening of an academy in Ipswich he speaks in this manner of his enlightenment and the value of classical studies to him:

My whole deliverance from miracles, etc., into theological freedom--such sense of order, beauty, and harmony in the world and life, and such recognition of the cosmical (or universal) in thought, and the radical in philosophy as has since been developed in me, began and was rooted in distinct form, before physical science interested me in any but the vaguest and most distant manner. And my whole joy of discovery and inward revelation in these directions is intimately associated with the splendid, clear, truth-facing heathenism of my school and college classics. . . . I bless my Greek and Latin classics more than any other school-teaching, or subsequent scientific study. And I must add, that no small part of this help comes in the introduction to a foreign world of language and belief. This of itself is a wonderful emancipation, and gives that shift of position which conditions fresh and free thought.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Johnson, Lectures, Essays, and Sermons (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1883), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Memoir by Samuel Longfellow, pp. 1-5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 6-7.



In 1842 he graduated from Harvard, second in his class. He was weak in health due to over-study and lack of sufficient physical exercise. He had not thought at all seriously about studying to be a minister in college. In fact, he wrote to a friend after having a letter from his pastor urging him to enter upon this calling--"Thank Mr. T. for his hint, but I shall not take it, begging his pardon."<sup>1</sup> But gradually the idea possessed him and in the fall after his graduation he entered Divinity School at Harvard.<sup>2</sup> In his seminary years he read much of Fénelon and many scientific books. Among his classmates at this time were Octavius Brooks Frothingham and Samuel Longfellow and their association at Divinity School began a close friendship which lasted a lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

Johnson's health continued poor and by the end of his second year a vacation seemed imperative, so he set out for Europe with his townsman Washington Very, visiting there Italy, Switzerland, France, and England. By 1845 he was back in Divinity School. His student pastorate work was done in Dedham and in the pulpit just vacated by Theodore Parker in West Roxbury.<sup>4</sup> The latter pulpit was an apt one for young Johnson, for he himself was as brave and fearless as Parker in setting forth without compromise what he believed to be the truth.

He graduated from Divinity School in 1846 and began to preach. But his great sympathy with Parker's spirit and liberalism as well as with the man, and his utter freedom of expression

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Heralds of a Liberal Faith, "The Preachers," American Unitarian Assn., (Boston, 1910), p. 186.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Lectures, Essays and Sermons, p. 27.



alienated him from any warm welcome to a pulpit. It lost him the opportunity of occupying Unitarian pulpits then available.<sup>1</sup>

During his period of candidating he preached in various pulpits around Boston. His liberal expression of opinion found response among the younger of his listeners but was not acceptable to the older people. He was charged with being a "Deist" and once when he took a text from the Apocrypha they said that he did not find "the Bible good enough for him." In addition he was accused of "bringing politics into the pulpit," and "going about breaking up churches." His first permanent pulpit was at the Unitarian church in Harrison Square, Dorchester, where he remained for more than a year. Here he made many friends, but for the most part the people were unresponsive. They resented his political preaching and his efforts on behalf of anti-slavery. Finally, he resigned the pulpit when his rights of freedom there were denied. From this time until 1853 he preached in different pulpits and lectured against slavery.<sup>2</sup>

In 1853 Johnson preached from Sunday to Sunday for over a year to a new society in Lynn, Massachusetts, which had at first been organized as Unitarian, and finally was invited to take permanent charge. However, upon his insistence, for he had never identified himself with a denomination, this society gave up its original organization and became an independent "Free Church." Johnson was a Unitarian in somewhat the same sense as Theodore Parker, without Parker's desire to be called by this name. He was really determined to be a free soul and even refused the rites of ordination, feeling that his inward call to preach was enough. This ministry lasted for seventeen years; he lived at

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-34.



his Salem home and travelled the six or seven miles to his parish on Sundays and when he made pastoral calls during the week. Johnson was happy here. He could preach as he chose, taking his subjects from whatever realms of thought or conduct seemed most appropriate at the time. Consequently his sermons covered matters of national or social interest and his forever beloved "natural religion." Despite his lengthy discourses his fame spread and he was sought far and wide by groups of reformers and their conventions.<sup>1</sup>

With the intensive work at his church, lecturing, speaking at conventions, etc. his health again began to fail and in 1860 he resigned from his pulpit for a vacation with Samuel Longfellow in Europe. It was during this trip that he and Longfellow arranged the materials for the new hymn book which they were to produce, called "Hymns of the Spirit." Johnson contributed the well known hymns--"City of God how broad and far," "The Will divine that woke a waiting time" and "Life of Ages, richly poured." In 1861 they returned to America and Johnson soon resumed his ministry in the Free Church of Lynn for nine more years. These were full, exciting years--of secession, war, and reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> Johnson's voice was clearly heard, fearing to criticize no personality or organization or movement.

Despite his activity, however, he found time to study and gradually as he became more and more involved in this work he felt the need for a full concentration of his efforts without the distractions of a parish ministry. Therefore in 1870 he gave up his pulpit in Lynn and with his departure the Society closed its door, never to reopen it again. For six years Johnson lived in

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<sup>1</sup>Heralds of a Liberal Faith, "Preachers, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup>Lectures, Essays, and Sermons, p. 92.



Salem, but in 1876, at the death of his father, the family home in Salem was broken up and he moved with his sister to the ancestral home which was bequeathed to them in North Andover. Here he was very happy and the out-of-door life in the beautiful setting of the farm considerably improved his health.<sup>1</sup> This was only temporary, however, for as the years wore on his constitution became more and more weak, and in 1882 he died. The funeral services were held in the Unitarian Church which he had attended--"rejoicing to find there an independent ministry of breadth and kindred to his own." It is significant and wholly in tune with the ardors of his life's work that the sentences used in the service should have been taken from the Scriptures of various nations, and the hymn one that he had written--"I bless thee, Lord, for sorrows sent."<sup>2</sup>

Johnson was a transcendentalist by nature as well as by conviction. Like Emerson, he was a born idealist with a strong intuitive rather than logical bent. Truths seemed to him to come directly from their source without mediation or induction. What he inwardly felt to be the light of divine insight he considered imperative to express and preach. At first his transcendentalism was a natural sentiment; later it grew into a carefully thought-out rationale. There are occasional indications that it approached mysticism.

At the same time that he was a transcendentalist he was also an evolutionist, treating evolution as a gospel. It is to his credit that he was able to reconcile the two, and he did so by drawing a sharp limit to which evolution might go, preserving the spiritual values and those of personality and character to

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 140.



transcendentalism alone, warning against the inroads of science into these sacred places, adjuring against the materialism to which a too intense pursuit of strict evolution might lead. This materialism received both his scorn and his sarcasm. Above all he put the religion of nature, to which he gave his wholehearted allegiance and affection. Thus he could elevate the mind to supreme heights, and maintain that its source was in the universe as a whole and not in mere organic matter. When he wrote he did so with the intention of celebrating the dignity and the scope of the mind; "to illustrate the advent of living mind into the universe, to set forth the potentialities of the cosmos, so far as this can be done on the field of history."<sup>1</sup>

Johnson's ideal was the reality of aspiration. He believed that all men responded to what was highest, failing only when that which was highest was not properly presented to them. His aim was to dignify mean men by showing them that a divinity did exist which lay within them, waiting to be called upon. His function, as he conceived it, was to lay before men the best that he could see they might receive from the inspiration he felt intuitively was always present in good things.<sup>2</sup>

It was natural then that deity for him would be the Supreme Mind, manifesting itself in all the appearances which the world presented. This made him more of a pantheist than a theist, but a pantheist conditioned by a decided emphasis upon human factors. Thus he could be objective but at the same time sensitive to human sympathies. Nor did he ever identify God with man,

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Johnson, Oriental Religions and their Relation to Universal Religion. "Persia." Introduction by O. B. Frothingham. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1885), pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xx



maintaining a strict polarity between man as the finite term and God as the infinite term. This made an eternal distinction between the two, but not an essential distinction. Such an idea of God could be translated into the synonyms of Substance, Unity, Law, Cause. God as infinite substance lost the attributes of personality or individuality which made deity more comprehensible as Absolute Being, while man clothed in personality was recognizable as human yet possessing enough of the attributes of God to allow him to draw from the divine.<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to know all this in order to appreciate not only the man Johnson, but also his works and the purposes behind his writings. Since mind was the true spiritual reality of the universe he believed that he could show the steps in its manifestation by disclosing in the examination of other religions their progress in the ascent toward maturity. His volumes were written from this point of view, and if at times he became over-enthused by the goal toward which he strove the reader can absorb the contents of these books with sympathetic understanding by making the proper allowances for this theory.

It is not exactly known when Johnson's interest in Oriental religions was sufficiently aroused to move him to begin his particular studies. Sometime before 1852-53 he gave in Salem a series of lectures which were the bases of his later intensive work. He called these lectures "The Universality of Religions Ideas, as illustrated by the ancient faiths of the East." In January, 1854 we find him writing to Samuel Longfellow:

I have been putting the Oriental Lectures into a more sermon-ic form, to awake, if possible, some desire for a broader culture in the people. They are mostly immersed in business, and there are positively no literary advantages.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. xvi-xviii.

<sup>2</sup>Lectures. Essays and Sermons. Memoir by Longfellow, p. 47.



And in November of the same year, he wrote

I am now engaged every Monday evening, in lecturing at Watertown; my seven plagues of Egypt, or golden candlesticks, or whatever else--the Eastern Lectures.<sup>1</sup>

In January 1855 he wrote to the same friend,

As to the Lectures (on Oriental Religions) can you get enough tickets taken to save them from becoming a kind of private or parlor readings, a thing whereof my native modesty has an invincible horror? Do you know anything about the Lectures? Have you heard the testimony of any competent person who has listened to them? I don't ask in order to make up my own mind about them, of course, but in order that you and your friends may not be deceived, getting something very different from what you expected.<sup>2</sup>

Evidently, he gave these lectures in several different places and even presented them in Brooklyn in 1858. Of these six lectures the writer of his Memoirs says,

I remember the wonder and charm of these lectures of his on a subject then so very novel, and in which he was a pioneer; and the delight which his recital of the poem beginning--"The snow-flake that glistens at morn on Kailasa," which he had found in some missionary volume, gave.<sup>3</sup>

During the Civil War years Johnson took an intense interest in public affairs and in the progress of the war, but, nevertheless, he found time to devote to his studies on other religions. He began to gather and digest his materials. He used the works of the five or six best Orientalists in the world--those who had attempted translations. But at their best he found the versions unsatisfactory. He interested himself profoundly in what evidences archaeology had at this early date produced, and was attracted particularly to the cuneiform remains. Some of the authors and books consulted were Harlez, Haug, Spiegel, Darmesteter, Lenormant, Sayce, Renouf, Legge, Williams, West, the "Records of the Past," the "Sacred Books of the East" and, of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 42.



course, Rawlinson and Max Müller. He read missionary books, books and articles on travel--everything, in fact, that he could find written in German, English or French. This was the next best thing to a personal knowledge of the countries, the people, their language, and the institutions about which he was writing. Since he felt that religion arose out of and was an integral part of the lives of the people, he wrote about their governments, educational systems, science, their social life, etc. The volumes which he produced were more than mere accounts and more than compilations; they were interpretations--philosophical and psychological interpretation wrought from the idea and motive which moved throughout his whole labors; the attempt to show the relations of the various religions to a universal religion, a religion behind and beneath all religions, manifesting itself in different forms, customs, rituals, modes of thought. It was the spiritual and philosophic insight which the man Johnson provided in his writings that made them unique.<sup>1</sup>

The first volume of his "Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion" was called "India" and appeared in 1872. In October of that year he wrote to Miss Lucy Osgood:

If you find the book (the India) attractive reading as well as historically instructive, that greatly adds to my comfort in thinking of its prospects in this busy age. It has cost me labor enough, that is certain; yet it is a labor of real love, combined with an intense sense of a great demand from the side of spiritual culture and higher relations of sentiment and imagination, in the present condition of the races calling themselves "Christian." I hope I have done something to stimulate these forces, and help toward the grand interpretations of natural religion that are yet to come.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-97. Also Johnson. "Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion." Persia. Introduction by O. B. Frothingham, pp. x-xi.

<sup>2</sup>Johnson, Lectures, Essays and Sermons, Memoir, pp. 106-107.



With such a point of view Johnson was bound to treat his materials with understanding and sympathy, making allowances for extravagances and seizing upon the eternal manifestations which were sourced in a sentiment which he felt to be universal. Max Müller could say of him after his death:

What I admire most in Samuel Johnson was his not being discouraged by the rubbish with which the religions of the East are overwhelmed, but his quietly looking for the nuggets. And has he not found them? And has he not found what is better than ever so many nuggets,--that great, golden dawn of truth, that there is a religion behind all religions, and that happy is the man who knows it in these days of materialism and atheism?<sup>1</sup>

Johnson's volume on India reached 800 pages. It was written with a theory behind the writing, but a theory which would allow for a maximum of objectivity. It was divided into three sections; the first on "Religion and Life," the second on "Religious Philosophy" and the third on "Buddhism." The first section begins with a description of the people called primitive Aryans, their original geographical location, their migrations, and their life which gave rise to their peculiar religious expressions, continuing with an analysis of the Hindu mind. He attempts to classify Hindu thought in relation to China and Persia.

The Hindu mind is subtle, introversive, contemplative. It spins its ideals out of its brain substance, and may properly be called cerebral. The Chinese--busy with plodding, uninspired labor, dealing with pure ideas to but little result, yet wonderfully efficient in the world of concrete facts and uses--may be defined as muscular. And the Persian, made for mediating between thought and work, apt alike at turning speculation into practice, and raising practice to fresh speculation, so leading out of the ancient form of civilization into the modern, no less plainly indicates a nervous type.<sup>2</sup>

In dealing with the Hindu mind as predominantly cerebral

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. x, underscoring mine.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion. India. (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1872), pp. 58-59. Underscoring mine.



Johnson tries to show how this was conditioned by the divisions within the land, the particular political organizations, its foreign relations, its sciences, its grammar and philosophy, and the force of its historical traditions. He writes about the Hindu languages, practical and physical interests, how physical nature made its imprint upon the mind, how all the forces, man-made or God-made, condition Hindu mentality. He speaks of the change in Aryan thought due to the movements of these people--from a stimulating environment where Varuna held sway, to a country where Indra assumed control:

The freedom and force of self-conscious manhood could hardly be expected of a people who were migrating further and further into tropical lowlands and wildernesses. The keen goads of the mountain air were forgotten. Lassitude crept over the will and relaxed the practical understanding, till they seemed to lie buried in the helplessness of dreams, confounded with this overwhelming life of physical nature; and their place came to be defined by the philosopher as that stage in human development where man as yet knows not that he is other than the world in which he dwells.<sup>1</sup>

Leaving the close discussion of the Hindu mind he moves to a treatment of the Rig Veda, the hymns of the early people, and how the traditions of the people conditioned their religious and philosophical outlook. Then he treats the making of the laws by the priestly class, as found in the Dharmasastras, comparing again and again these regulations with the laws of the Old and New Testaments. He devotes an interesting chapter to the women of India and their place in society; comparing their position to the status of women in other religions and other countries. Other headings indicate the subject matter of which he deals: "Social Forms and Forces," including "Caste," "Mitigation of Caste," "Democratic Relations," "Slavery," "Democratic Tendencies," "Misgovernment" and a final chapter on "Hindu Character."

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 82-83.



The second section of India which covers Religious Philosophy begins with a treatise on the Vedanta. He introduces this subject with a discussion on the concepts of Unity, and the Absolute expressed by different religions and systems of thought, which very naturally leads into a detailed analysis of the conception of the Absolute in Hindu thought, the ideas of reincarnation, the Maya--of the phenomenal world. Always in his discussions of a particular system of thought he refers to other religions or other philosophies to use as illustrations, comparisons or contrast, for instance:

Hebrew religion, fervent and spiritual as it was, emphasized separation between God and the world, especially the world of man. . . . Hindu belief emphasized oneness of God with the world; even in the play of illusions seeking fearlessly for the reality they disguised.<sup>1</sup>

In the next chapter he deals with the Sankhya philosophy, treating it in a full and fascinating manner. Then he takes up the Bhagavad-Gita, the latest of the Puranas. It is interesting to see how he always used his material to demonstrate the importance of his special theory of Universal Religion:

This boundless hospitality to existing beliefs indicates at least the force with which the religious sentiment was embodied in them all at one time when the Bhagavad-Gita was written. One element betrays the Brahmanical source from which it flowed, the maintenance, however modified, of caste. Brahmanism is here seen, surrounded by rationalizing independent tendencies, seeking to accomodate itself to their demands, while maintaining the unity of religious development as a whole. Like the somewhat analogous production of the Christian Church, the Johannic Gospel, it is the work of the highest spiritual genius, the most deliberate and careful constructive skill, the most earnest desire of religious unity, which the tendencies it represented had at their command; and a spirit is moving through its speculative deeps, that could not be bound within the limits of any creed,--the spirit of Universal Religion.<sup>2</sup>

These subjects give Johnson the opportunity in the next

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 354-355, underscoring mine.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 436.



chapter to write on the "Piety and Morality of Pantheism." Then follows chapters on "Incarnation" and "Transmigration" and he closes this section of the book with a chapter to which all other discussion has been leading--"Religious Universality." His opening words are enlightening. They are significant both to show the important motive through and by which he wrote and this in turn to understand more thoroughly Johnson's mind, and also to give wise counsel to the present age and the western world which is still under the dominating and persuasive biases which its religion both stimulates and demands. At the risk of over-quotation I include here the better part of his first two pages on Religious Universality.

Christianity indulges the hope of absorbing other historical religions, and sinking their sacred names and symbols in its own. This anticipation demands our notice, as bearing directly on the interests of Universal Religion. It means, substantially, that Christianity has confident faith in its own adequacy to meet universal needs. A like self-reliance is to be noted in all great historic religions. They would not be religions, had they not this instinct of universality. In proportion to the earnestness of its conviction has each refused to hide its treasure, and hastened forth with the glad tidings of one all-sufficing gospel. Judaism made the world ring with its cry to the nations to come up and serve Jehovah. Buddhism has swept a third of mankind into its wide-open folds of brotherhood. Confucius sways an empire of empires, and China entitles herself the "Central Kingdom." The religions of Moses, Jesus, Mohammed,-- religions of the Desert as they are, summoning men apart to intense concentration on personal needs and exaltations, to a burning thirst for living waters,--have transformed their passionate egotism into a boundless absolutism, claiming divine right by "special revelation" to impose their formulas upon all mankind. Even Persian Bābism parcels out the nations of the earth already, by anticipation, among its ambitious chieftans.

All great religions involve this assurance of a right to master the world; and the method is now the sword, now love and sacrifice, now prophetic affirmation, now the proclamation of a dogma or a name. However delusive the hope, there is a deeper truth than its own exclusiveness allows it to apprehend, seeking expression in its dream.

For what all these religions are really affirming, however unconsciously, is the adequacy of the human faculties to find whatever, as spiritual forces, they require. The confessors of each faith hold their own mode of satisfaction to be valid for all men, only because they know that all men have one



nature. But this implies that the power and the right of obtaining such satisfactory solution cannot be limited to themselves. So that when the instinct of expansion which impels them comes to be really comprehended, all beliefs that assume the common human nature to be inadequate should drop away; and all exclusive claims on the part of distinctive religious traditions and symbols to represent it should be resigned.<sup>1</sup>

The beauty, clarity and frankness of such writing has been and is an inspiration in ages of dogmatism. This is what makes Johnson's writings not only informative but spiritually awakening and mentally stimulating. Johnson is in his element in this chapter, for he is giving vent to the deepest stirrings and most devout convictions of his heart.

In his treatment of Buddhism which composes the final section of this book on India, Johnson deals with its speculative principles, tying them up with the Hinduism which he has so well covered--the Nirvana, its ethics and humanities, the story of the man--Gotama and his times, the idea of after-life in India as expressed by several of the different sects, Buddhist civilization, and the ecclesiasticism of Buddhism, its degeneracy, imagery and relics, mythology, a short consideration of the Hindu type in Buddhism, leading into a few final pages on his favorite theme--Universal Religion.

India is a book ahead of its time--one which if written today with all the advantages of modern scholarship, up-to-date philology, archaeology, etc. could well be put alongside the best of modern productions. Perhaps the reason why it did not meet immediate acclamation was because of its free and broad spirit, its lack of sectarian prejudice or partisanship. The world would have to wait until another century for such a work to meet not only with popular applause, but with appreciation of its merits

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 555-556.



by most critics. As it was, there were few in America then who realized the significance of the work. It made no great stir in scholastic circles; the North American accorded it only a brief book notice. The New York Tribune did better, for Mr. Ripley of that publication gave it a long and favorable review:

The reader who is curious in the history of opinions will hardly find a more instructive guide in the obscure labyrinth into which he is tempted by the study of Oriental reasonings and fancies. Mr. Johnson has thoroughly mastered the subject of which he treats, by the thoughtful researches of many years.

Other papers saw fit to give it appreciative notices. But on the whole it was not met with enthusiastic response by the public in general. "It is somewhat difficult," said his friend, Samuel Longfellow, "to account for the want of just appreciation of these books in certain critical quarters."<sup>1</sup> Johnson wrote to Longfellow in December, 1872, the following:

Oriental religions I hear nothing of in this busy world, where books are pouring down like a summer shower, and men put up their umbrellas against such big ones as mine, as they would against hailstones of the "hen's-egg" species. Nobody advertises the book except Osgood in his lists; but it may be selling for all that, and in spite of "The Nation." I do not see a word in English literary Journals about it, and doubt now if I shall do so at all. I have not seen a copy of the second edition yet.<sup>2</sup>

But the very need of a second edition and later a third indicates that there was some sale for the book. In May, 1873, he wrote to Longfellow: "If you think of anything I can do to improve the India for a third edition, of the speedy need of which I am advised by Ticknor, please write."<sup>3</sup> But even though the volume passed through three editions Johnson did not realize any considerable amount of money from it. A letter written in

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<sup>1</sup>Memorial, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup>Lectures, Essays and Sermons. Memoir, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 109.



December, 1874, tells of his receiving only fifty dollars from its publication for the whole year.<sup>1</sup>

Johnson was relieved upon his retirement from the active ministry and lecture-platform, for it gave him surcease from interruptions of his valuable studies. He was by 1873 involved in writing his "China" which was to be a companion piece to the "India." In a letter to Longfellow in September of this year, he says:

I am happy in being shelved from pulpit or other similar demands [by illness], since it gives me freedom for studies and plans of publication that are more suited to my nature, and demand undisturbed labor for some time to come. "China" grows under my hand; books and researches and opportunities open; much is of the highest interest. The Tao-te-king of Laotze grows grander as I see its bearings on Chinese conservatism, and as an indignant protest of the spirit against the traditionalism of ages. There are Chinese philosophers, too, whose ideas singularly unite old mysticism with a positivism and rationalism that brings them home to the modern experience we are passing through to-day. . . . So you see I am quite reconciled to being left out and dropped from preaching-desks and lecture-stands.<sup>2</sup>

So his work on China went on apace. In May of 1875 he writes:

I have just finished my chapter on "How the Chinese 'Make History'." There is no encouragement for printing another volume in the sale of the first. But the pleasure as well as the duty of writing it remain not materially different, I think, from what they would be if such encouragement existed. This spring and summer, I have pretty fully worked up the topics of Language and Literature, Poetry, the Shi-King, the Shu-King, and the History in general, from my MS. notes which all lie ready to be used, to the end of the work. Religion and Philosophy are now about all that remain, as the closing up of the subject.<sup>3</sup>

And in 1876 he says in a letter to Longfellow:

I have. . . a pretty fair showing to make of Oriental matters, being on the final copy of the latter end chapters. . . .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 118.



In the following year he took his labor of love to the printers.

He wrote to Longfellow in February:

I was especially sorry not to find you in on Friday, for I was on my way to Wilson's [the printer] with my big Chinese baby; a half-scared carpet-bagger, burdened in body and mind, and I wanted a bit of encouragement. Do you know, this book is coming to light without hint, suggestion, or mechanical aid from living man or woman? Not a step in the process could I commit to anyone but myself; not from choice, but from the necessity of the case. But before putting some fifty pages or more in Wilson's hands, I wanted to talk with you on a few points. If you thought I was wise and not foolish, I should have trudged to the printers with a lighter heart.<sup>1</sup>

And in June of the same year he wrote:

I sent the last proofs [of the China] in from Boston yesterday, and came home with a sense of lifted cares, till I began to think of the probable fate of the heavy craft I was launching before the hasty practical American world that will only tolerate what it can measure, and absorb, with a "touch and go". . . . I mean to be prepared for the evil fame of attempting so much, without knowledge of the forty thousand characters of the Chinese script. If I knew these, I should know nothing else. In the way of psychological interpretation I should be simply nothing.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense Johnson was a true scholar--he wrote from the love of the subject, the promise of broadening the scope of the American mind, and palliate the sores of mental narrowness. A little praise from his friends, a kind of encouraging word from a critic were all the reward he expected for his months and years of labor, and all that he really ever hoped for. Actually he was seriously taxed financially to have the books printed. In July, 1877, he wrote to R. H. Manning:

I have just sold out stocks to pay the stereotyper's bill of nearly two thousand dollars for China, which I fear you will think a great folly in a shelved man with an income scarce able to keep him. Well, it does look like a "tempting o' Providence," I allow, to write books that most people will vote dull at sight--to spend so much in getting them out with little prospect of demand. All I can say in excuse is--that I cannot help it. And if I get a good word back from friends

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 119-120.



like you, it is a reward worth living and working for. You will see, at least, that I have not been lazy, and that I have had a purpose in some earnest, poorly as I succeed in showing it to the many.<sup>1</sup>

His treatment of "China" was much the same as that of his "India." He divided the work into four sections: "Elements," "Structures," "Sages," and "Beliefs," thus in the early parts thoroughly laying the groundwork by an extensive discussion of Chinese institutions, social life, government, mental types, etc. for an intensive study of the various religions of China. In a sense the book is really more of a comprehensive inquiry into Chinese civilization than a limited work on the religion alone. But this is as understandable as his procedure was in the "India." He wanted to show how the religion of a people is integrally tied up with their lives and why their religions manifested themselves in certain peculiar forms. He was motivated by the thought that without a good knowledge of the conditions under which the Chinese people live there is no good explanation of the forms of the faiths to which they give their fealty and devotion. There are many brilliant philosophical passages which are gems in themselves, (it is a temptation not to quote them) written in wholehearted sympathy and understanding of the peculiarities of the natives to the western mind. In his first section on "Elements" he covers the field of the Chinese mind, the occupations or "Labor" of the people, their science, their external relations with other nations and peoples, the anthropological stock and sources of the Chinese (called "Ethnic Type"), and the resources of China. In "Structures" he divides the section into "Education," discussing it in all its various aspects with a thoroughness and fullness which is admirable, "Government," which includes

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 120.



in its scope a detailed history of the nation, "Language"--its psychological bases, its changes, and its importance to the Chinese way of thinking, "Literature," a further chapter on "History," and "Poetry," including a long discussion of the Odes. The third section called "Sages" begins with a treatment of "Rationalism" which is an answer to the charge of atheism among the Chinese, with a full explanation of what the word really means. Then he takes up Confucius, his biography, traits of character, the affinity of his ideas with other philosophies such as stoicism, the doctrine of Confucius--his ethics and religion, and then the influence of the sage. After this Johnson writes a chapter on Mencius, the man, his times, his relations with the autocrats, his philosophy, and his influence. The last section dealing with "Beliefs" discusses Patriarchalism, the ancestral shrine, the future life, Fung-Shui, Divination, and Theism. In this same section he goes on to Buddhism, treating of its invasion of the land, its development and its flowering as a Chinese religion in what we know as Mahayana Buddhism. Following this he writes a chapter on the effects of missionary efforts--their failures and fruits; Tao-ism and Tao-sse. The final chapter is a full discussion of Chinese philosophy, including the Y-King, Metaphysics, and anthropology. In this book, as in "India" it is very apparent that Johnson is trying to show that the signs of a universal religion are readily visible to those who with diligence seek to learn about the people of China and their thinking. This is apparent from the very first page --

The vast population of China, so uniform in physical type that they seem free from foreign admixture, isolated by the ocean and by the loftiest mountain barriers in the world, have shaped for themselves a peculiar civilization whose inveteracy proves it a genuine outgrowth of the race and soil; while its startling contrasts with other Asiatic forms render such common aspirations as shall be found to underlie this



difference all the more impressive signs of Universal Religion.<sup>1</sup>

I am not trying to imply that it was with any indirection that Johnson forced this interpretation upon his readers, for the very title of his book about China, as on those on India and Persia, indicates his purpose. He was possessed with a vast and great idea. He, himself, in his studies could see it running like a red thread through all the beliefs of the world, and he merely sought to bring this to the attention of those who would carefully and conscientiously read what he had so diligently produced.

Apparently the "China" met with more favorable and widespread approval from critics than had "India," for we find Johnson writing to Longfellow in July, 1877:

Wilson is paid by the sale of stocks, and Osgood has done very well in advertising. The notices, so far, are excellent. Ripley in the Tribune is admirable; he credits me with absolute freedom from partisan spirit, and from attempts to get up a case for private theories, and with writing in the pure interests of truth. . . .<sup>2</sup>

In August of the following year he remarks to Longfellow:

Wasson wrote a review of China for the North American, which the editor accepted, kept it six months, and at last sent W. the money and declined to print it at all. Trubner advises me to print a cheap edition for the English market. I don't like the idea for such a book, and I am willing to let it go altogether.<sup>3</sup>

In writing to Longfellow concerning his reading of the introduction to Max Müller's new series of Translations of the Oriental Scriptures, with which he was ill-pleased due to the fact that Müller had ignored previous translations, Johnson refers to a

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion, China. (Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1878), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Lectures, Essays and Sermons. Memoir, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 123.



review of the "China" by Dr. Beal in the "Nation" which Johnson terms "extraordinary" because Beal had claimed the philosophical writings had never been translated!<sup>1</sup>

With China finished and published Johnson could go on with his studies of Oriental religions. He began his notes for "Persia" in 1877, and in February of the following year wrote to Longfellow:

I am working away as you will believe, not in prospect of any reward, but the doing of my own work and the good word of a few friends. This theme is largest of all. I should call it Iran rather than Persia, but shall not. I am back among the cuneiform tablets and the sources, as I find more and more, of the religious history of the world, and especially of the great "historic faiths."<sup>2</sup>

In May he wrote:

For me, farm-labors use up my energies, I find, so far as sometimes to interfere seriously with my disposition for literary work. I am learning the arts of limitation, however, and am well along in Assyrian, Babylonian, and the rest of late Iranian discoveries. The interest of these cuneiform revelations in their bearing on Western religions--which I find nobody, so far, among the investigators has any idea of --is surpassing. . . .<sup>3</sup>

In January, 1879, he wrote to R. H. Manning:

My watches about the "Sacred Fire" of Iran are proving attractive, as I expected; though there are many shadows flitting round those far mountain altars that it is not easy to grasp and hold fast. The worst of studying the Avesta literature is that it is still so far from being satisfactorily translated, though five or six of the best Orientalists in the world have tried their hands at the work; and we have here very little outside help from contemporary history. Gleams of light and beauty tantalize one through the mists that no linguistic astronomer has yet resolved. But the grand threads are traceable that bind the Western religions to the Iranian hearth.<sup>4</sup>

He was culling every source available for material on his subject. Now and then in his letters we can clearly see this

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 121-122.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 124-125.



process. For example, in October, 1879, he wrote the following to Samuel Longfellow:

....I am making much use of a French translation of the Avesta by Harlez, which strikes me as more careful and thorough, as well as more comprehensible than the others. I have also used Haug and Spiegel. Bleek, you know, simply copies Spiegel, whose method, taking the commentators for his guide to the mysteries of the old Bactrian language, is opposed by Haug, and appears rather questionable. Spiegel's great work, Iranische Alterthumskunde, is a vast mine which I have explored, as I did Lassen's corresponding work on India; but it lacks philosophical value, as, in fact, do all books on the old Oriental Dualism. I am at work now upon Mani, the terrible bugbear of the Christian world down to the twelfth century. To be a Manichean was worse than to be a Jew, and to meet a more cruel fate. Yet Mani's aim was universal and eclectic, and the ascetic morality of his followers as good as any of their time.<sup>1</sup>

Johnson's chief aim was not only to give facts about other religions but to supply a philosophic interpretation of them which would be illuminative as well as descriptive. He continued the work on his "Persia" and in 1880 in February he wrote to Longfellow:

I get on with my Persia as well as I could expect, having this winter been wrestling with the obscure and impalpable relations of Manicheism and Gnosticism with the early Christian Church. Now I am on the pleasanter track of the Shah-Nameh, and at the doors of Sufism, etc. Oh, for the mental spring and freshness of days gone by!<sup>2</sup>

Already the stress and strain of farm work and intense literary efforts is beginning to tell on the scholar and impede his research and writing. Yet he was still filled with enthusiasm over his subject and could write R. H. Manning in July of 1880 in this vein:

....Little time remains, or strength either, in this ingathering season, for far-off Iran and its heroic poetry and the raid of fiery Arabs on the old Eastern world. I have finished my tale of Firdusi's great epic this spring and summer, and I wish it might tell something of what a grand national Epic may be and do.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 127-128.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



He wrote these lines about his work to the same person in March, 1881:

I have been all the winter at work on the universal relations of the great Mohammedan faith, its defects and their parallels with those of Christianity. I assure you, a great subject, whether or not I can get a hearing for it, and any recognition of my own eye to the future, as well as the present, of belief and science.<sup>1</sup>

He felt his growing weakness and apparently wondered if he would be spared until the labor was finished. The following letter, at least, indicates his suspicions and at the same time reiterates his recognition of the importance of his writing an interpretive study:

I am busy at the old work; a great deal that must be read and thought over and made the most of, for what I am weak enough to think are philosophical uses. "I hope to be spared till," etc., as the tiresome old commentators of the Bible were wont to say. But I won't admit that my writing is "commentating." If it can only be true and <sup>2</sup>large interpretation of human history, that is all I ask.

This was the last he wrote about the progress of "Persia." In the summer of 1881 Samuel Longfellow visited him in North Andover, and Johnson read some chapters of the unfinished work to his visitor.<sup>3</sup> When he died in February, 1882, "Persia" was still incomplete, although a few weeks of revising, the addition of a chapter on Persian poetry, arranging and paging, and some slight emendation would have been sufficient to finish the long labor. However, the volume was published by his friends exactly as he had left it, save for those details which the work of publication demanded.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 135-136.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 140

<sup>4</sup>Johnson, Persia. Introduction, p. viii.



The last volume of the Oriental Religions can take its place with the others as an outstanding study, although unfinished. He wrote with the same theory in the back of his mind, with the same enthusiasm over discoveries which again and again seemed to him to prove his contention that beneath all religions there was one universal religion that was natural to the mind of man. Again the "Persia" covers a vast field--of geography, civilization, history, philosophy, religious practices and thought. Johnson was never content unless he could delve deeply into the conditions and the experiences of a people in order to understand thoroughly and explain why a certain mode of ritual was used, or why the trend of mind was so accentuated in a certain direction. He wanted to make sure, also, that his readers understood the words he was using, so in this volume, for example, he devotes a whole chapter to the meaning of Symbolism, taking illustrations from the Hindus, the Chinese, the Christian and Jewish Scriptures as well as from Zoroastrianism. He speaks of particular symbols, such as the tree or the fire, showing how they were used in mythology. He tries to explain the difference between ancient and modern symbolism. His first section of the volume is devoted to what he calls "The Advent of the Religion of Personal Will--Its Elements," which includes this discussion of symbolism and the beginnings of the Moral Sense among the people of Iran and their philosophy. In the latter he shows the affinities of the Avesta with the Vedas of India. From this he goes on to the development of Zoroastrianism, its predominant ideas and its chronological history, followed by a chapter on the Morality of the Avesta and one on Zarathustra. Then he treats the Avesta Literature as a piece of writing, carefully criticizing its form and development, showing its relation to the other Bibles of the World and its



effect upon them. In the same section he discusses the cuneiform monuments of the Accadian and the Assyrian, in which he was particularly interested; using the very latest discoveries of his time as subjects for the dissemination of information. Then he turns to the Hebrews and the Chaldeans for a thorough-going study, making comparisons, showing contrasts, finding relationships.

His third section deals with Political Forces in which he treats matters of history, taking up first Babylon, Cyrus and Persia, then Alexander the Great and the Sassanian Empire which followed Alexander. As he goes along he shows the importance of political movements for the religions and the philosophies of the peoples affected. The next sections he entitles "Philosophies," dealing with Manichaeism and Gnosticism. Lastly he writes on Islam, including a chapter on Mohammed and finally one on the Shah-Nameh; or, Book of Kings which was unfinished at the time of his death. There were no notes left which indicates any further chapters, and the editor remarks that probably he intended to write no more than a conclusion. But the volume, nevertheless, is virtually complete, for throughout the work lies the conclusion toward which he was moving. Here a hint and there a statement indicates that the only rational result of such a study could be that there is a vital connection between the religions of personal Will, finding their culmination in Mohammedanism and Universal Religion, "and the natural and necessary evolution, in connection with scientific thought, of the worship of personal Will into the worship of cosmical Substance, Order, and Law."<sup>1</sup>

These books on Oriental Religions, it has been seen, were received with mixed approbation and destructive criticism. Some

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, "Persia." Note by A. M. Haskell, editor, p.783.



criticized Johnson's lack of personal knowledge of the countries and people of whom he wrote. Others deprecated his lack of knowledge of Oriental tongues or language, something which he, himself, freely admitted. Max Müller could praise Johnson's sincerity, his honesty and accuracy, but deplore his scholarship:

....Samuel Johnson's knowledge of Oriental Religions was at second-hand; and the little accidents that must happen to an historian or a philosopher who writes on Oriental religions at second-hand are just those that most exasperate Oriental scholars. . . . There are few things in his volume on the Religion of India for which, at all events, he could not give chapter and verse, though chapter and verse may not always come from the right book.<sup>1</sup>

Such criticism may or may not be entirely justified. It must be remembered that Johnson was writing primarily for interpretation--psychological interpretation. Other books dealt with the facts. His contribution was to explain, to compare, to find an idea which would be a chain of connection from one religion to another, or which linked all together, running as a substrate beneath them all. With this in mind it can safely be said that Johnson performed the task to which he had set himself. Perhaps his lack of knowledge of the languages hindered his deciding which of the various sources he used was the more correct, but if so, as Frothingham says, "the mistake, if there was one, was intellectual rather than critical."<sup>2</sup> Johnson, after all, was trying to show through "the ethical and spiritual import of the older civilizations the unity of human experience and to do justice to the spiritual nature common to humanity that speaks in differing faiths."<sup>3</sup> If, at all events, Müller's criticism was justified,

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, "Persia." Introduction, p. x.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>3</sup>Heralds of a Liberal Faith, "The Preachers" (Boston, 1910) A.U.A., p. 189.



Johnson's excellence in rendering sane and clear critical and philosophical judgment, in presenting in a beautiful style and attractive manner his subject matter, more than made up for the deficits which are implied.

If Johnson is criticized for writing with a theory in mind and attempting to choose only that material which fitted in with his theory, the answer is simple. Most writers write from a theory, explicit or implicit, overt or covert. Moreover Johnson began writing as the result of investigations into this material which had convinced him that the red-thread of universal religion lay beneath all particular manifestations. Perhaps at times his enthusiasm went beyond the limits of a cool and calculating judgment, or tended to adorn some phase of the subject too extravagantly; however, most often this received correction further on. In this regard, when one writes an interpretation of anything, showing the psychological motivations of an institution or a belief, there is always this danger of exhibiting a human weakness--that of being carried away by the inspiration of the moment. The only alternative for this is a purely scientific piece of work--neither flesh nor fowl--mathematically correct. Yet such an endeavor would lack the human quality or the human touch which Johnson, for example, gave so generously and which makes his volumes so fascinating and so readable. So there is a loss no matter which method is used. The discerning reader can always make allowances, being human, for the defects of a warmly human production.

It is the originality of these volumes which gives them their place in the rostrum of Oriental studies, just as it was their originality which made them unacceptable to the readers of an age which went no further than what was at the time acceptable.



There is a certain freshness about them as though Johnson had cleared the air of a maze of cobwebs in order to let the light shine through. His absolute innocence of any partisan spirit, his strenuous efforts to reveal only the truth, his complete tolerance and understanding along with his open-hearted sincerity make the volumes unique among the vast majority of such studies which tacitly admit the worth of ancient religions in order to demonstrate how superior is Christianity over them in its place as the acme and peak of all antecedent faiths, or which treat a foreign religion only to show its deficiencies. Today the volumes are, of course, out of date. Much has been discovered by philologists, or archaeologists, which renders incorrect or questionable many of the facts and figures which seemed to be the truth in Johnson's day. But the beauty of the prose lives on; the unique and original interpretation of religions as expressions, in the last analysis, of an underlying fundamental religion must always be recognized, and Johnson's theory of old religions as steps in the manifestation of the mind, illustrations of the developing consciousness of man, bears within it a truth which no modern critic can afford to discredit or pass over.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Henry Jordan says of Johnson:

He was a man of broad sympathies and outlook; and if he had been spared to complete the comprehensive programme he mapped out for himself, international scholarship would unquestionably have been very greatly the gainer. As it is, Johnson's name is in no danger of being forgotten; but his labours will be all the more fully appreciated when his successors understand better the chivalrous spirit in which they were invariably faced, and under the impulse of which they were made markedly contributory to the ends he had in view. From Louis Henry Jordan, Comparative Religion--Its Genesis and Growth, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George St., 1905.



## CHAPTER VII

### LYDIA MARIA CHILD

In the history of Unitarianism in America women have always had a prominent place. They were among the most active reformers; the fighters for notable social improvements. Untiring have been their efforts for woman suffrage, for prison reform, for abolition of slavery, and other noteworthy endeavors. In the field of this particular study also they have held some of the foremost places. It has been seen how Hannah Adams was the first American to attempt the writing of a book which would give a summary account of religions other than Christian. Now another woman appears who, after half a century, is to carry on the work of Miss Adams, though, of course, in a much more thorough fashion, and it is safe to say that Lydia Maria Child was the first person in America to give a really adequate review for her day of the various religious beliefs and practices of different nations and peoples in a comprehensive way.

Lydia Maria Child was born in Medford, Massachusetts, on February 11, 1802, the daughter of Susannah (Rand) Francis and Convers Francis, a baker who was well known in his community for possessing a strong character. Her first schooling was under a quaint figure called by the children "Ma'am Betty" whose disorderly bedroom was the schoolroom. Entirely unconventional, this teacher made a lasting impression on Lydia by her habits of tobacco-chewing and drinking from the spout of her teakettle. When Lydia was twelve years old she moved with her family to



Norridgewock, Maine. Here the opportunities for education were very poor, but, nevertheless, by her interest in reading whatever she could lay her hands on, and most likely with the assistance of her brother, Convers Francis, who was later to become the Unitarian minister in Watertown, Mass. and then a well-known professor in the Harvard Divinity School, she managed to educate herself so that by the time she was eighteen she was able to teach in Gardiner, Maine. At the conclusion of that school year she left Maine to take up residence with her brother in Watertown. She studied and taught for a year at a seminary in Medford, and then from 1825 to 1828 conducted a private school in Watertown.<sup>1</sup>

During this time she founded the first monthly magazine for children, called the "Juvenile Miscellany" and wrote her first novel, Hobomok: A Tale of Early Times. In 1828 she married Mr. David Lee Child, a member of the Massachusetts Legislature and editor of the "Massachusetts Journal." Mrs. Child became an ardent abolitionist, writing in 1833 a revolutionary pamphlet called, "An Appeal in Behalf of the Class of Americans Called Africans." This was really the first anti-slavery book, and it was so unfavorably received by many that the sale of her novel was greatly reduced and the "Juvenile Miscellany" was killed.

In 1838 she went to Northampton with her husband to begin experiments in beet-sugar raising in which Mr. Child was interested, but four years later, in 1842, left this type of life to begin seven years' work as editor of the "Anti-Slavery Standard," a New York weekly devoted to the abolition movement. Retiring from this endeavor in 1849 she and her husband made

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<sup>1</sup>American Authors, p. 147.



their home in Newton, Mass., until 1852 when they went to live in Wayland upon a small farm which Mrs. Child had inherited. Here she lived until her death in 1880 at the age of seventy-eight. This farm the Childs made a station in the Underground Railroad, through which escaping slaves were routed. Besides her intense efforts in the cause of anti-slavery, Mrs. Child wrote voluminously in fiction and non-fiction. Her best known works, in addition to the two mentioned above, being Philothea, 1836; Fact and Fiction, 1846; Autumnal Leaves, and Tales and Sketches in Prose and Rhyme, 1857; Miria: A Romance of the Republic, 1867; The Frugal Housewife, 1829, which commanded a large sale; The Mother's Book, 1831; The Oasis, 1834; History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations, 1835; Letters from New York, 1843-45; Isaac T. Hopper, 1853; Progress of Religious Ideas Through Successive Ages, 1855; The Right Way and the Safe Way, 1880; Correspondance with Governor Wise and Mrs. Mason of Virginia, 1860; The Freedman's Book, 1865; and Aspirations of the World, 1878.

As a writer Mrs. Child was not outstanding. She had little creative gift and her works were of didactic nature and weak in characterization. Her poems and stories for children were meritorious only as pioneer works, and her tales and sketches for adults, while they possessed some beauty and realism, all lacked the final touch. However her writing was forceful, logical and clear, and this undoubtedly made for their popularity.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Child was always in the vanguard of the reformers, writing and working not only for the abolition of slavery, but

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. IV, p. 68.



also for woman suffrage, sex education, and other causes. In this respect her influence was great. Her religious ideas were completely unorthodox. While in Wayland she was a parishioner of Dr. Edmund Sears, the Unitarian minister, but she had gone beyond him in her thinking. With her rationalistic tendencies, however, there were elements of a spiritual mysticism which were hard to reconcile. She never went all the way over into spiritualism in all things."<sup>1</sup> "Her opinions were much nearer akin to those of Theodore Parker. Only a Unitarian of that type could perhaps at this early period have conceived the history of religion as an evolution of one and the same spiritual element through successive ages."<sup>2</sup>

The greatest literary effort of her life was her history of all religions. The Progress of Religious Ideas Through Successive Ages, which was published in 1855. She had begun work on this as early as 1848, and devoted the next seven years of her life to it as a labour of love. This book has been claimed by some as the first treatise upon what is now known as "Comparative Religions." At least it is apparently the first effort since Hannah Adams to write an account of the various religious beliefs held by peoples other than Christian.

On July 14, 1848, she wrote to her brother, Dr. Francis,

My book gets slowly on. I am going to tell the plain, unvarnished truth, as clearly as I can understand it, and let Christians and Infidels, Orthodox and Unitarians, Catholics, Protestants and Swedenborgians growl as they like. They will growl if they notice it at all, for each will want his own theory favored, and the only thing I have conscientiously arrived at is not to favor any theory at all.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. IV, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Seth Curtis Beach, Daughters of the Puritans, A Group of Brief Biographies (Boston: A. U. A., 1905), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 109.



This was the spirit in which she wrote and with all its weaknesses of scientific method "The work was for its time a remarkable attempt to see Christianity in its relation to other religions."<sup>1</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier in his biographical introduction to "The Letters of Lydia Maria Child," says

It is an attempt to represent in a candid, unprejudiced manner the rise and progress of the great religions of the world, and their ethical relations to each other. She availed herself of, and carefully selected, the authorities at that time accessible, and the result is creditable to her scholarship, industry, and conscientiousness. If, in her desire to do justice to the religions of Buddha and Mohammed, in which she has been followed by Maurice, Max Müller, and Dean Stanley, she seems at times to dwell upon the best and overlook the darker features of those systems, her concluding reflections should vindicate her from the charge of undervaluing the Christian faith, or of lack of reverent appreciation of its founder.<sup>2</sup>

In May of 1856, the year after her three volumes had been published, she wrote to Miss Lucy Osgood

....this "Progress of Religious Ideas" was a real pilgrimage of penance, with peas in my shoes, walking over rubble-stones most of the way. You have no idea of the labor. It was greatly increased by my distance from libraries, nearly all the time, which rendered copious extracts necessary. ....Most devoutly do I believe in the pervasive and ever-guiding Spirit of God; but I do not believe it was ever shut up within the covers of any book, or that it ever can be. Portions of it, or rather breathings of it, are in many books.<sup>3</sup>

Lydia Maria Child, it can be seen from this statement, was a true descendant of the liberal spirit, following in the footsteps of Channing and the Unitarian pioneers, living in the time when Transcendentalism was seeking the religious spirit beneath and through all religious expression. She was one with Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott, influenced probably to a very great extent by her brother, Convers Francis, and Theodore

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<sup>1</sup>Dict. of American Biography, Vol. IV, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Letters of Lydia Maria Child, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1883), p. xii.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-78.



Parker.

The following are extracts taken from the preface to this work which reveal her purpose in writing and the undogmatic spirit in which she bravely pioneered in a field which before long was to have its place in the curriculum of the great universities of the land.

I would candidly advise persons who are conscious of bigoted attachment to any creed, or theory, not to purchase this book. Whether they are bigoted Christians, or bigoted infidels, its tone will be likely to displease them.

My motive in writing has been a very simple one. I wished to show that theology is not religion; with the hope that I might help to break down partition walls; to ameliorate what the eloquent Bushnell calls "baptized hatreds of the human race." In order to do this, I have endeavoured to give a concise and comprehensive account of religions, in the liberal spirit of the motto on my title page. (There she had quoted J. R. Lowell--

God sends his teachers unto every age,  
To every clime, and every race of men,  
With revelations fitted to their growth  
And shape of mind, nor gives the realm  
of Truth  
Into the selfish rule of one sole race:  
Therefore, each form of worship that  
hath swayed  
The life of man, and given it to grasp  
The master-key of knowledge, REVERENCE,  
Enfolds some germs of goodness and of  
right.)

The period embraced in my plan extends from the most ancient Hindoo records, to the complete establishment of the Catholic church.

While my mind was yet in its youth, I was offended by the manner in which Christian writers usually describe other religions; for I observed that they habitually covered apparent contradictions and absurdities, in Jewish or Christian writings, with a veil of allegories and mystical interpretation, while the records of all other religions were unscrupulously analyzed, or contemptuously described as "childish fables," or "filthy superstitions." I was well aware that this was done unconsciously, under the influence of habitual reverence for early teaching; and I was still more displeased with the scoffing tone of sceptical writers, who regarded all religions as founded on imposture. Either way, the one-sidedness of the representation troubled my strong sense of justice. I recollect wishing, long ago, that I could become acquainted with some good, intelligent



Bramin, or Mohammedan, that I might learn, in some degree, how their religions appeared to them. This feeling expanded within me, until it took form in this book. The facts it contains are very old; the novelty it claims is the point of view from which those facts are seen and presented. I have treated all religions with reverence, and shown no more favour to one than to another. I have exhibited each one in the light of its own Sacred Books; and in giving quotations, I have aimed in every case to present impartially the beauties and the blemishes. I have honestly tried never to exaggerate merits, or conceal defects. I have not declared that any system was true, or that any one was false. I have even avoided the use of the word heathen; for though harmless in its original signification, it is used in a way that implies condescension, or contempt; and such a tone is inconsistent with the perfect impartiality I have wished to observe. I have tried to place each form of worship in its own light; that is, as it appeared to those who sincerely believed it to be of divine origin. But even this candid method must necessarily produce a very imperfect picture, drawn as it is by a modern mind, so foreign to ancient habits of thought, and separated from them by the lapse of ages. The process has been exceedingly interesting; for the history of the religious sentiment, struggling through theological mazes, furnishes the most curious chapter in the strange history of mankind.

....I am not aware that any one, who truly revered the spirit of Christianity, has ever before tried the experiment of placing it precisely on a level with other religions, so far as the manner of representation is concerned. Even wise and candid men, more or less unconsciously, adopt a system of withholding evidence on one side, and accumulating it on the other; as the most honest lawyers do, when pleading a cause. The followers of all religions practise self-deception of this kind. They forget that most human beings would seem great and holy, in comparison with others, if all the weaknesses were carefully concealed on one side, and protruded into prominence on the other; if all the excellencies were rendered conspicuous on one side, and kept out of sight on the other. I have tried to avoid this tendency. ....Sustained by conscious integrity of purpose, and having executed my task faithfully, according to the best of my ability, I quietly leave the book to its fate, whether it be neglect, censure or praise.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lydia Maria Child, The Progress of Religious Ideas Through Successive Ages (New York: C. S. Francis & Co., 1855), pp. ix-xi.



These are surely noble purposes and show that Mrs. Child wrote with no preconceived theory or design. Her idea was to show that religion is a universal thing; that only the expressions of it are different; that religious sentiment must be expressed and is done so in the writings of all the great religions of the world. Her work is not addressed to scholars, but to the common people-- "the popular mind." This accounts for the many explanations of phrases used throughout.

A brief account of the treatment given religions and the organization of them in her volumes may be instructive. In the first volume she includes a discussion of "Hindustan" or India, Egypt, China, Thibet and Tartary, Chaldea, Persia, Greece and Rome, the Celtic Tribe, and the Jews. A chapter is devoted to each, and the treatment within each chapter is no more uniform than the organization or plan of the volumes as a whole. For example in her first chapter, on India, she includes: the "Antiquity of Hindostan, Anchorites, Pantheism, Gods and Goddesses, Sacred Emblems, Bramins, Castes, Transmigration, Heavens and Hells, Sacred Books, Crishna, Bouddha, Sects, Temples, Holy Cities, Festivals, Hindoo Women, Sacred Animals, Degeneracy of Hindoos, Fakeers, Magic, Nadac Shah, Narayun Powar, and Rammohun Roy." There is no consistency to such organization. Instead of dealing with the various religions separately she takes a country and then includes all the different sects within that country, the religious habits, the monuments, the practices, outstanding leaders, etc. However, when she gets to the Jews she departs from this scheme and takes them as a people. In her second volume, Mrs. Child deals with the "Jews After the Exile," includes a retrospective chapter in which different religions and religious ideas are compared, and then passes on to a discussion



of the early Christian movement. Her third volume begins with a continuation of Christianity. Some of it is done in chronological order, but the chapter for the most part deals with outstanding Christian leaders, discussions of Heretics, Slaves, Churches, Images, Saints and Rosaries, Christian Sacred Books, Spurious Books, Nations converted to Christianity, Separate Churches, etc. Following the chapter on Christianity she treats of Mohammedanism and concludes the work with a chapter in which parallels and contrasts are drawn between the various religions and practices discussed throughout the volumes. It is a general discussion of what these religions have given to the world and to the culture of their particular adherents. She does not spare any religion in her criticisms of unfavorable tendencies; such, for example, as the Christian persecution of the Jews. All religions, she feels, have made contributions to the progress of humanity, but she gives Christianity first place by saying:

If any one is disposed to doubt that Christianity contains within itself a vital element of progress, superior to any other spiritual influence by which God has yet guided the world, I think he will be convinced by comparing the practical results of different religious systems. All of them contain truth, all of them have produced, and are producing, greater or less degrees of good. But after making due deductions, on account of the iniquitous practices of Christendom, we are still compelled to admit that there only do we find sympathy, benevolence, and active exertion for the improvement of all mankind. Christianity is the only form of religion which has warmed up whole nations, to sacrifice time, talent, and wealth, for the benefit of remote and degraded classes of people, from whom no return of advantages could be expected.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to say what the influence of these volumes has been on the thought of America in regard to Comparative Religions. When Lydia Maria Child sent Emerson a copy

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<sup>1</sup>Child. The Progress of Religious Ideas. v. iii, pp. 433-434.



Of this work, he wrote her that he had received it with much gratitude, and mentioned "....all the wealth that their 'Contents' and my dipping into the Indian portion assure me...."<sup>1</sup> Wendell Phillips said in the address which he delivered at her funeral, "Her 'Progress of Religious Ideas' was no mere intellectual effort. It was the natural utterance of a deep, kindly, and respectful sympathy with each." The intellectual and scholastic world was not deeply stirred by her work. It caused hardly a ripple and is not even mentioned by those who have made surveys of work done in Comparative Religions and the History of Religions in the United States. Lydia Maria Child, like Samuel Johnson, had had no special training in this field. The books she consulted were standard works. She made no original translations, for she knew none of the Oriental language. Her treatment of each religion was far from thorough, and there are many instances of unscientific method and a lack of scientific knowledge. An examination of the sources she used which she appended to her last volume gives ample testimony as to the reasons for her failure to produce a truly accurate and scientific account of world religions, for there apparently was no discrimination made between authoritative works and questionable historical sources, legends, and writings which would never have been consulted by a scholar who had a correct sense of the relative values of these writings.

Yet, despite these failings, it was a start, and there were others trained for the task who could carry on from such incomplete beginnings. More important, perhaps, than the actual work which was done was the evidence of a tolerance which was

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXVI, p. 482.



willing to examine other beliefs in an unprejudiced, liberal manner and accept the truths which they offered in an unpartisan spirit.

Mrs. Child approached her last efforts at writing with all of these virtues, and, it is necessary to add, all of her particular defects as a critical writer. In 1878 appeared her Aspirations of the World, a compilation of choice selections from the religious books of the world. Since this book was not an attempt to present a comprehensive study of other religions, many of the criticisms which apply to her History of Religious Ideas cannot be held valid here. Nevertheless, her purposes in presenting this work were much the same as those which prompted her in 1855. For her motive was to present the universal aspects of religion; to show that there is much in which mankind may agree in the various religions of the people all over the earth. In this book she avoided presenting the theological aspects of any one religion, feeling that they were merely impediments to a sympathetic understanding of the truths which lay within the scriptures of that belief. She speaks of this in her introduction:

I do not assume that any one religion is right in its theology, or that any others are wrong. I merely attempt to show that the primitive impulses of the human soul have been essentially the same everywhere; and my impelling motive is to do all I can to enlarge and strengthen the bond of human brotherhood.<sup>1</sup>

She is conscious of the need to bring writings of other religions before the people in an unprejudiced manner, feeling that often before when such selections have been compiled they have been weighted in favor of Christianity. Thus she says

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<sup>1</sup>Lydia Maria Child, Aspirations of the World. A Chain of Opals, (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1881), pp. 1-11.



I have selected from the best portions of other religions, and I have done the same with regard to our own. There has been some unfairness in our manner of representing the Sacred Books of nations outside of Christianity. The poorest specimens of their holy writings have been frequently brought into comparison with the best of ours.<sup>1</sup>

The book is organized according to subject matter as follows: Ideas of the Supreme Being, in which she includes selections from Egyptian writings, Hindu, the Shu-King, Old Testament, Greek, Vedas, Lao-tze, Zoroastrianism, Roman, Mohammedanism, and American Protestantism; Praises of the Supreme Being, Prayers, Immortality, Worship, Inspiration, Inward Light, Truth, Moral Courage, Natural Law of Justice, Good for Evil, Self-control and Forgiveness, Temperance, Personal Purity, Honesty, Slander, Benevolence, Brotherhood, Family and Friends, Childlike Character, Reward, Work, Riches, Government, Animals, Nature, Miscellaneous Maxims, Parables, and a final section of the Fraternity of Religions. Then follows an explanatory note on the Sacred Books--Hindu, Egyptian, Chinese, Buddhist, Hebrew, Talmud, Chaldea and Persia, Greece and Rome, Mohammedan, Sabaeen, and Christian. A census of the different religious bodies is given in the Appendix. At the end of each selection she has added the date, as nearly as it was possible to determine, of the writing of the selection given. It is interesting to note that in her Bibliography she has included: Selections from the Sacred Anthology by Moncure D. Conway, Oriental Religions by Samuel Johnson, Life of Buddha by Charles D. B. Mills, The Unity and Universality of the Religious Idea by Samuel Longfellow, and the Sympathy of Religions by T. W. Higginson.

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<sup>1</sup>Child, Ibid., p. xxix.



No doubt this little book found a place in many household libraries throughout the country and served to contribute to a just appreciation of other moral, ethical, and religious writings besides Christian. It was probably used by many liberal ministers in quotation from their pulpits and reinforced their efforts to show Americans that other countries and peoples had much to give in the way of loft precepts and teachings. Whittier spoke of this book in his introduction to her "Letters" in these sentiments,

It has the broad liberality of her more elaborate work on the same subject and in the mellow light of life's sunset her words seem touched with a tender pathos and beauty.<sup>1</sup>

In the glow cast by the larger luminaries working in the field of Comparative Religions, Lydia Maria Child shows up only as a lesser light, but it is significant that she was a pioneer, breaking the way for those who with more aptitude, greater resources, and better training made more of an impression upon the intellectual world. The condemnation of her works by a dogmatic and stereotyped orthodoxy were the first vigorous hammer blows which as time passed were to grow more and more feeble when newer, more accurate productions appeared. Without her endeavors they undoubtedly would have had a harder task; with them there was prepared a more fertile field for reception.

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<sup>1</sup>Child, Letters, p. xix.



## CHAPTER VIII

### MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY

One of the most vigorous liberals of the latter part of the 19th century was Moncure Daniel Conway, and his contributions to the study of non-Christian religions make it worthwhile to consider him in some detail. He was born near Falmouth, Virginia, on March 17, 1832, the son of Walker Peyton Conway and Margaret (Daniel) Conway. His father was a member of the state legislature and his mother a descendant of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Walker Peyton Conway was a large slave-holder and both parents were fanatical Methodists. Raised in this strict household, Moncure studied at Fredericksburg Academy, and then entered Dickinson College at Carlisle, Pa., a Methodist institution, when he was fifteen. While in college he underwent a conversion to Methodism, but it is believed that the conversion was a deliberate one, brought about in the hope of pleasing his parents more than anything else. He studied law for a time in Warrenton, Virginia, but in reading Emerson, Carlyle and Coleridge his thoughts began to turn to the ministry as a profession, and it was not long before he had become a Methodist Circuit Rider in Virginia. He is remembered in this as carrying perhaps as strange an assortment of books as any circuit rider had ever kept in his saddle-bags; among them were the Bible, Emerson's "Essays," Watson's "Theology," Carlyle's "Latter Day Parables," Coleridge's "Aids to Reflection," and others.

His readings in these books soon caused him to grow out



of sympathy with the doctrines of his denomination, and at twenty-one years of age (1853), to the great disappointment and displeasure of his parents, entered Harvard Divinity School. While there he saw his mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, for whom he had the most profound admiration and respect, and became acquainted with the leaders of Concord and Cambridge intellectual groups. Upon graduation in 1854 he returned home, but because of his violent anti-slavery attitude was very unwelcome, and when the neighbors discovered that he had befriended a fugitive slave, they virtually drove him out of town. Following this he accepted a call to the Unitarian Church in Washington, D. C., and was installed there in the latter part of 1854. Things went well enough there until when in 1856 he preached a fiery sermon against slavery he was dismissed from his pulpit. In that same year he was invited to accept the pulpit of the First Congregational Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he remained for six years. There he married Ellen Davis Dana in June, 1858. Meanwhile he began to write for periodicals, including the Atlantic Monthly and in 1860 became editor of "The Dial," a Monthly Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion. This periodical was a namesake of the more famous "Dial" to which Emerson had contributed. Moving to Concord, Mass., in 1862, he edited the Commonwealth, a Boston magazine, which was an anti-slavery organ something like Garrison's "Liberator" save that the "Commonwealth" had more literary tendencies. Conway had by this time produced several books and pamphlets on slavery and was well known as an indefatigable worker for abolition. In 1863 he went to England to lecture for the cause of the North, and while there was induced to accept the pastorate of South Place Chapel, Finsbury, London, an ultra-liberal church. Here he remained for



twenty-one years, writing and traveling a great deal, and even serving as correspondent for the New York World at the front during a part of the Franco-Prussian War. He studied demonology and lectured on this subject before the Royal Institution. As time went on his views became more and more liberal and radical. In 1884 he resigned his pulpit and returned to America, but he often visited Europe in the years which followed and from 1892 to 1897 was again pastor of his English church. His later years were spent in writing, study, and travel. He died in Paris on November 15, 1907. Among his writings perhaps the best known is his scholarly work on Thomas Paine (The Life of Thomas Paine) which completely reversed public opinion on the character and work of this patriot. All in all he published over seventy books and pamphlets, the most important being several on slavery, on oriental religions, on demonology, two novels, the life of Paine which is mentioned above, his edition of Paine's works, the lives of Hawthorne, Carlyle, and Edmund Randolph, his Autobiography, and his last important work My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East.<sup>1</sup>

His life was interesting, colored, and varied. There was hardly a famous man with whom he was not acquainted and this fact has moved some to call him a "tuft-hunter," but apparently he was well liked and admired by all of them. To go through the list of noted people whom he knew well is like examining "Who's Who."

Conway had become interested in the Scriptures of other religions when in the summer of 1853 he had lived in Concord, while attending Harvard, and had met Emerson and Thoreau.

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<sup>1</sup>

Dict. of Am. Biog., Vol. iv, pp. 364-365.



Meeting Emerson was to Conway like becoming acquainted with a god, so high did he hold the author in esteem. Emerson was interested in the youth and they struck up a friendship which ended only with Emerson's death. At Concord Emerson opened up his library to the young man and Conway avidly devoured the unusual volumes which the sage had collected. He speaks of this in his autobiography,

During that halcyon summer I read the Oriental books in Emerson's library, for he not only advised me in my studies but insisted on lending me books. To my hesitation about taking even to Ponkataset the precious volumes, he said "What are they for?" In my dainty little room whose window opened on a beautiful landscape with the Musketquit wandering through it to the Merrimack, or perhaps seated in the vine-covered veranda, I read Wilkins's "Bhagavat Geeta," which thenceforth became part of my canon. Close indeed to my heart came the narrative of the charioteer (the god Krishna in disguise) driving Arjoona to the field, where the youth sees that his struggle is to be with his parents, teachers, early companions.<sup>1</sup>

Emerson also introduced him to the Persian "Desatir" and when he handed it to Conway he said that he felt the Ancient Persian scriptures to be more intellectual than any other sacred writings. Conway was delighted in the litanies contained in this book, finding "amid the exaltations" always the "happy beam of reason." In addition Emerson acquainted him with Saadi of Schiraz, "who has been to me as an intimate friend through life's pilgrimage"

For the "Rose Garden" (Gulistan) I had been prepared by my garden in Frederick Circuit, my "Seclusaval". Saadi was its interpreter, and restored it to me. For I could not enter deeply into wild nature, but dearly loved a garden. One day when I was walking with Emerson in his garden, he stopped near a favourite plum and said, "This is when ripe a fruit of paradise." He then discovered one that was ripe

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<sup>1</sup>Moncure Daniel Conway, Autobiography, Memories and Experiences, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1904), 4 vols. v.1., p. 143.



and managed to pluck it for me. How simply was this man fulfilling all my youthful dreams! He personally loved Saadi, and later edited the "Gulistan." One day he told me he had found somewhere a story about him. Saadi was travelling on foot towards Damascus, alone and weary. Presently he overtook a boy travelling the same way, and asked him to point out the road. The boy offered to guide him some distance, and in the course of the conversation Saadi spoke of having come from Persia and from Schiraz. "Schiraz!" exclaimed the boy, "then perhaps you can tell me something of Sheik Saadi of Schiraz." The traveller said, "I am Saadi." Instantly the boy knelt and with tears kissed the hem of his skirt, and after that could not be parted from Saadi, but guided and served him during his stay in Damascus.

(And lo, here I am with my grey hairs seeing my own Saadi as he told me the little tale that filled my eyes, all unconscious that my soul was that of the Damascus boy and was kissing the hem of his garment!)<sup>1</sup>

When in Europe Conway met the famous Oriental scholar, Max Müller, and the two became fast friends for over thirty years. Müller shared Conway's intense admiration of Ralph Waldo Emerson; in fact, he had dedicated his Introduction to the Science of Religion, in its altered and enlarged form, to the Sage of Concord. At the time of Emerson's death Müller wrote Conway,

I feel cast down like yourself, and have many more names to add to the death-roll of this year (1882) and the last. There seems no one left to work for and to look up to now. Ruskin is the only star of the first magnitude left, and he, I hear, is setting.<sup>2</sup>

Conway while at Concord in 1853 had taken copious extracts from the Oriental books which Emerson had placed at his disposal, and continued this practice when he was in Cincinnati. In 1860 when he was editing his "Dial" he printed every month selections from various religions under the heading, "The Catholic Chapter." As minister of the South Place Chapel in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 311.



London, he formed the habit, beginning in 1864, of taking his second lesson of the morning service from some Oriental book and before long both lessons were "selected without any discrimination in favour of the Bible." This practice received much comment from its inception and his people began to clamor for a book which would be a compilation of these selections of which within a few years Conway had a large number. This enterprise, he tells us, required a great deal of labor, for he was determined that the selections should be exact, but it was a thoroughly enjoyable experience to him. He was fortunate in gaining the sympathetic help of Dr. Rost, the librarian of the India House, a man possessed with a large amount of knowledge concerning Oriental works. "Unworldly and unselfish, carrying in his head treasures of learning, remote from roaring London, he manifested surprise and pleasure that any one should need exactly that counsel he could bestow." Rost pointed out to Conway great masses of unpublished translations which were rich stores of material, albeit that it was necessary for the compiler to strain out carefully "endless details concerning body and mind mingled in the sacred instructions."<sup>1</sup>

As the work went on Conway found more and more treasures of writings upon which he could draw. In his autobiography he tells of his discoveries:

I employed several Hindus and Persians to search books not translated. I was encouraged by R. M. Childers, and shall never forget the delight I experienced when he sent me Buddha's "Excellencies." My hunt for Eastern flowerets brought me into further acquaintance with Professor E. H. Palmer of Cambridge University (England). He revised several Persian translations for me, and but for him I might have

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 329.



known nothing of several fine pieces of Nizami. He said that he regarded the Persian ideas as the finest, and had repeatedly told people that when they had thoroughly studied those books they would 'begin to know something about religion.'<sup>1</sup>

Conway had entered upon the work with two purposes: one was to provide himself with a collection of ethnical scriptures for use in his pulpit, and the other "to provide thoughtful readers with some idea of the ethical and religious geography, so to say, of the world."<sup>2</sup> To the reading public Conway addressed the following words in his preface to the collection,

The purpose of this work is simply moral. The editor has believed that it would be useful for moral and religious culture if the sympathy of Religions could be more generally made known and the converging testimonies of ages and races to great principles more widely appreciated. He has aimed to separate the more universal and enduring treasures contained in ancient scriptures from the nest of superstition, the dross of ritual. Under the necessary limitations of such a work.... the editor has confined his selections to those books of a moral and religious character which.... are still the least accessible to European readers.<sup>3</sup>

In assembling the selections we are told that, since type-writing was unknown at that time, he and his wife would "carpet the floor" with the extracts, distributing them under the various headings. The arrangement of the collection is by subject matter, and under each heading there is contained a large number of selections from the writings of different religions. These headings include: Laws, Religion, Theism, Worship, Wisdom, Superstition, Knowledge, Ethics of Intellect, Charity, Love and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Moncure Daniel Conway, The Sacred Anthology: A Book of Ethnical Scriptures. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1877, pp. xv-xvi.



Friendship, Nature, Man, Character, Conduct of Life, Humility, Greatness, Justice and Government, Action, and Sorrow and Death Sanctions. At the conclusion of the book he lists his principal authorities and reserves an Appendix for chronological notes.

The chief objection which has been raised regarding this compilation is the lack of a chronological order, and of proper ascription of each passage to author or religion at the end of the selection. Conway, however, makes up for this defect somewhat in his "Chronological Notes" by giving the sources according to the index number of each selection. But, even so, this method is not entirely satisfactory. Max Müller points out omission of chronological order and also regrets that the compiler has not included the Upanishads:

What we should have wished would have been a more strictly chronological arrangement of these extracts.....We miss, particularly for the later development of religious thought in India, extracts from the Upanishads, which would have yielded beautiful contributions to a Sacred Anthology.<sup>1</sup>

In answer to this criticism of the lack of any chronological order Conway explains in his Preface to the book, that he has purposely refrained from this because of the prominence of sectarian bias:

The same reasons which have prevented my attempting to arrange the materials of this book in any chronological order, have operated yet more strongly to restrain me from endeavoring to supply any estimate of their comparative character. It may well be questioned whether amid the sectarian divisions of the globe, the man exists who can weigh the various religions of mankind with entire freedom from all bias derived from his own race or education; and, if that were possible, it would still be doubtful whether the materials for satisfactory generalization exist in accessible forms. The seriousness

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<sup>1</sup>

Max Müller, "The Sacred Anthology," The Academy, (London: October 31, 1874), p. 477.



of the awakened interest in the religious and moral development of the East has been especially manifested in the extent to which theoretical labels formerly attached to Oriental systems have disappeared. I believe there have been few who have set out from any of the familiar classifications of religions--this more devout, that more moral, a third more intellectual--but have found their lines of limitation confused at every step in real study of the subject. It must be a long time yet before any race can fully appreciate the degree to which the superiority or even the character attached to its own Sacred Books are the result of association and loyal feeling.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, however, The Sacred Anthology is a splendid example of scholarly work done in a field for which the compiler has had little formal training. His lack of acquaintance with the lands from which his scriptural selections are taken was compensated for by adhering strictly to authorized sources and by employing native scholars of those lands to assist in translation and counsel. Furthermore, Conway took pains to discuss this work with the chief Oriental scholars of Europe before its publication.

The book received immediate endorsement from noted authorities on the Orient and hearty congratulations were given Conway from many well-known men, not the least of these being Max Müller, himself, who reviewed the book (see above) in the London periodical, "The Academy." Müller says in this review,

This book shows what may be achieved by enthusiasm and perseverance. Mr. Conway tells us that he is not an Oriental scholar, but he has given us what no Oriental scholar has yet given to the world, though for many years the world has been expecting and demanding something like a Sacred Anthology. As Oriental scholars shrank from the undertaking, Mr. Conway set to work, collecting all the translations which he could find ready to hand, and extracting from them whatever seemed to him of real value. ....He knew what he could do, and what he could not do, and by limiting the scope of his undertaking, and giving to his collection a purely practical

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<sup>1</sup> Conway, Sacred Anthology, pp. xi-xii.



character, he has certainly succeeded, in accomplishing a useful and important task.<sup>1</sup>

Conway had sent his first copy of the book to Müller just before the meeting of the international Oriental Congress in London (1873), and he was surprised when Müller referred to it in his opening address:

A patient study of the Sacred Scriptures of the world is what is wanted at present more than anything else, in order to clear out ideas of the origin, the nature, and the purposes of religion. In the end we shall be able to restore that ancient bond which unites not only the East with the West, but all the members of the human family, and may learn what a Persian poet meant when he wrote many centuries ago,--I quote from Mr. Conway's "Sacred Anthology"--"Diversity of worship has divided the human race into seventy-two nations. From among all their dogmas I have selected one--the love of God."<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps the crowning glory of Conway's efforts and an event which in magnitude of importance for the world's knowledge of Oriental religions can hardly be exaggerated was the statement by Müller to Conway to the effect that "the interest in Oriental literature stirred up by the anthology inclined him to undertake the publication of the Sacred Books of the East!" Conway in recalling this conversation goes on to say, "I am thus carrying into my closing days the reflection that my Sacred Anthology contributed something to the publication of the Sacred Books of the East,--the chief religious achievement of the nineteenth century."<sup>3</sup>

Besides Müller's commendation of the work, Conway had cordial congratulations from Martineau, Tennyson, Tyndall, Professor Newman, Miss Cobbe, and many others. The book went

<sup>1</sup> Müller, op. cit., 476-477.

<sup>2</sup> Conway, Autobiography, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 331-332.



through several editions which testified to its popularity. It was printed first at Conway's own expense, with Trübner, the first printer, selling it on commission. Conway's outlay had been covered by subscriptions. The compiler says that his profits were good, despite the fact that he gave many copies away and contributed his royalties to an edition donated by Walter Thompson to India. The press notices were universally favorable, and Conway was particularly gratified at the immediate use to which the book was put in different places. Walther Thompson, a member of Conway's congregation at South Place Chapel who had lived in India, paid for an entire edition (See above) and shipped it off to India where it was difficult to obtain such books. Dean Stanley mentioned the work in a sermon in Westminster Abbey and quoted selections from it. Furthermore, The Sacred Anthology found a place in many liberal pulpits in England and Scotland, and was widely used by ministers in America.<sup>1</sup>

The book brought Conway a host of new friends from all parts of the world, including some from Persia, India and Japan. Tatui Baba, an expriest from Japan "begged me to go and preach in Tokio, and let the people know that cultured people in England and America did not believe the gospel of the missionaries."<sup>2</sup>

In 1883-84 Conway made a trip around the world, visiting those countries from which had come the various scriptures included in his compilation. It was not merely a pleasure trip, for we are told that he studied "especially the various religions of mankind,--Buddhism, Brahmanism, Parsaism, Jainism, Islam, Brahmoism, Theosophy, Mormonism, and other movements."<sup>3</sup> He made

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 416.



full notes and observations of his studies and later incorporated them in his book My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East. (1906).

Conway was a lucid writer, but has been characterized as somewhat pedestrian.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, his liberal leadership in writing pamphlets and books, his lectures and sermons, all of which served to sever the strangling bonds of prejudice and bias, his intense work for abolition, his efforts to acquaint the world with the riches of moral, ethical, and religious thought in religions not Christian, and his scholarly and sympathetic treatment of one of America's first patriots, have left an influence and a memory which the world cannot soon forget.

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<sup>1</sup>

American Authors, p. 171.



## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

With the rise of interest in the latter part of the 19th century in the study of religions other than Christian it is only to be expected that there were many Unitarians, ministers and laymen, who in their search for truth and illumination explored this widening field. There were many who advocated a universal religion; who thought each people had much to contribute to a faith which would transcend the theological differences and emphasize the common elements to be found in all world scriptures; who believed that from some such effort sufficient foundations could be laid for a really vigorous world religion in which all nations and peoples would have a part. Some made distinctive contributions in the form of books and pamphlets, others voiced their sentiments in sermons and lectures, while still others worked for the organization of meetings in which representatives of various lands could come together in a spirit of harmony and cooperation and establish there an understanding and a tolerance which would make great strides toward the attainment of these ideals. In all of this attention was paid to the great mass of religious writings of all nations. The number of those who held these sentiments is legion, and an exhaustive study of their work would be prohibitive in such a treatise as this. Furthermore the line of demarcation between those who were merely interested in other religions and those who made active studies is not often clear and might lead to a vast amount of material not properly pertinent to the restrictions necessary



to this dissertation.

However, after having treated the outstanding Unitarian men and women in America who made singular additions to the store of knowledge about non-Christian religions, it remains in conclusion to say a few words about some of the lesser figures in order that the study may be complete.

Such a broad field as that of investigations into world religions, I suppose, always contains its curious characters. The American Unitarians had such in Martin Kellogg Schermerhorn. Schermerhorn was born in Durham, New York on March 20, 1841, the son of E. Bogardus Schermerhorn and Elizabeth (Merritt) Schermerhorn. He studied at Williams College and received his A. B. degrees there in 1865. Deciding upon the ministry as a profession Schermerhorn entered Union Theological Seminary in the same year, and graduated in 1867. He was ordained a Presbyterian minister and in the year of his graduation from theological school accepted the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church in Amarna, New York, where he remained until 1870. Upon leaving his first church he made up his mind to become a Unitarian and entered this fellowship in 1871, becoming minister of the Church of the Unity in Boston. Following this he had a brief pastorate at Buffalo, New York, and then moved to Newport, Rhode Island, where he was installed in the Channing Memorial Church. Schermerhorn stayed in Newport for eight years and at the end of this period decided to change denominations for a third time. In 1885 he was ordained a deacon in the Protestant Episcopal church and in 1886 was made a priest, becoming rector for three years at the Episcopal Church in Tarrytown, New York. He moved from there to Arlington, Massachusetts, and was for six years rector of the Episcopal Church in that place.



Then in 1897, he changed denominations for a fourth time and returned to the Unitarian fold, holding pulpits in Richmond, Va.; Ottawa, Canada; and in Willimantic, Conn. In 1905 he retired to Cambridge, Mass., and entered Harvard College as a special student for a number of years. Such a checkered career among these different religious bodies indicate that Schermerhorn found it difficult to obtain complete satisfaction in any one denominational allegiance. He was a searcher for a Universal religion and a church which would transcend denominational differences. He felt that he could with complete justification be a member of any of the churches. This seems to have been the driving force in his life, and the work he did was centered about the effort to bring people to the realization that not only was a church Universal possible but extremely desirable. This attitude accounts for his many books and papers in connection with world religion. He contributed prolifically to newspapers and magazines on the subject of "Cosmopolitan Worship." Among his books may be listed Sacred Scriptures of the World, 1883, (This was renamed Sacred Scriptures of World-Religion in its third edition in 1914) Universal Brotherhood, 1903, Universal Worship, 1904, and World Religion Hymns and Prayers, 1914. The Unitarian Year-Book for the years 1924-25 in an obituary says, "His knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures of many lands was vast and he never faltered in following the ideals of the brotherhood of man."<sup>1</sup>

The format of his book on Sacred Scriptures is unique, if not to say eccentric. It seems as though he is making every effort to impress upon the reader the importance of his own

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<sup>1</sup>Unitarian Year-Book, 1924-25, American Unitarian Association, Boston.



catholic views, and the importance of his work for a universal religion, and it is done in such a way that the reader cannot help but be inclined to hold the author up to ridicule. A few examples will serve to illustrate this. In this book there are several unnumbered introductory pages, each one stressing catholicity of some sort. The first explains what is meant by "The Catholic and Universal Name" in which he tries to show that in all religions the world over there is one name for the Supreme Being which is a compound, meaning Father-Mother or Mother-Father or Heavenly Father or Heavenly Mother. His second page bears the heading "Common Foundations of Catholicity" and in this is a listing of ten languages which in the names of deities mean the same; thus: "I AM THAT I AM (Is-Is.) I am the Mother-Father of all beings, the Source and Support of all things. (Egypt)" He carries this same thing through all ten languages. On the next page he lists "Illustrative Scriptures of Catholicity" from various religions which carry the idea of the Supreme Being as Father or Parent. Then he gives "Poetic Citations of Catholicity" without any ascription as to sources, creating the unavoidable suspicion on the reader's part that the author himself has written them. Following this comes a "Personal Letter of Catholicity" from Max Müller to Schermerhorn encouraging the latter in his "endeavors after a Religion of Humanity." On the next page is a "Personal Record of Catholicity" which it may be wise to quote in full:

By maternal ancestry a birthright member of the Religious Society of Friends, and by paternal ancestry of the Holland Reformed and Presbyterian Denominations; from early boyhood a Church member and a constant worker with every accessible religious denomination; alumnus of Williams College, Massachusetts, and of Union Theological Seminary, New York; from student days a resolute non-partisan in Philosophy, Science, Politics, and Religion alike; co-worker with every intelligently honest



and devout cult or school but refusing to be tied to any party or sect; since the year 1876 a life-member of the American Unitarian Association; during three years pastor of a Presbyterian Church, twelve years rector of Protestant Episcopal Churches, twenty years pastor of Unitarian Churches in New York, Boston, Hartford, and Newport; now honorary ex-pastor of the Channing Memorial Church in Newport; originator and secretary of the first Catholic Congress of World-religions, held in New York City during January, 1884; compiler and re-translator of Sacred Scriptures of the World, the first Catholic Bible of World-Religions ever published; compiler and author of Hymns and Prayers of Universal Worship, the first Catholic Book of Devotion for World Religions ever published<sup>1</sup>; in fellowship with and an occasional speaker for organizations of World-Religion, such as the Society of Progressive Friends, of Free Religion, of Theosophy, of Vedanta, of Brahma-Somaj, of Bahai, of New Thought, etc.; from the year 1900 renouncing the "salaried" Ministry and accepting no pecuniary compensations beyond essential expenditures for services rendered; now and during the rest of competent active life devoted to the special work of World-Religion.<sup>2</sup>

A reader of these pages cannot help but find them "quaint" to say the least, and will have many questions to ask about the truth of statements made, the lack of modesty on the part of the author, and so forth. The Appendix to the Third Edition of Sacred Scriptures contains various "Commendations of the Press" and "Personal Commendations" both written and verbal. This is a most unusual procedure, for almost always these are found on the jackets of books and put there by the publisher. They do not serve their intended purpose of impressing the reader with the ability and catholicity of the author.

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<sup>1</sup>In organizing this hymn book Schermerhorn thought that he could find many hymns in the world which would voice the sentiment of "Our Father." However, finding only about 100 he sat down to write and for five years busied himself with the composing of hymns. Therefore in this book are contained 109 hymns of his own authorship, expressing in them the idea of "Our Father." Veritably, a second Wesley.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Kellogg Schermerhorn, Sacred Scriptures of World-Religion. Cambridge, Mass.: privately printed, 1914. From an introductory page.



Another page of the Appendix refers specifically to the history of the writing of this work. Schermerhorn says that he has been thirty-five years in the preparation of this volume, making widespread and studious research. "Re-translations, re-arrangements, re-punctuations, etc., have, over and over again, been made in efforts to produce, for every phrase and word, exact meanings and clear expressions." He explains that the first edition was put out by Geo. L. Putnam's Sons in New York in 1883, and despite the high cost of each copy (\$3.00) over 1000 were sold within a few months. But the "ultra orthodox critics" raised such a clamor over this book that the compiler decided not to have another printing immediately but to wait until

....he might have time to carefully reconsider the whole volume and make any changes in the translations, or in the arrangements, or in the statements of the preface, chapter-headings, or notes which might appear to be honestly and intelligently called for.<sup>1</sup>

But there were other reasons for waiting, he continues. The Comparative Study of Religion was being introduced in the schools, and Higher Criticism was commencing among the "orthodox Biblical Scholars of England and America." After fifteen years of watching and waiting, eager and unceasing study, Higher Criticism and the Comparative Study of Religion had "so confirmed the substantial accuracy," as well as the "timeliness of his work" that Schermerhorn believed the time to be ripe for a second edition in 1898. Upon reconsideration, however, in the face of new translations from Oriental Sacred Writings, he felt the book to be inadequate and decided to re-translate, re-arrange, and enlarge it. Therefore he ordered the printer to destroy the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Appendix. Apparently the "ultra-orthodox" critics were not only the "religious" orthodox.



electrotype-plates and he began afresh. Sixteen years more of work followed and the result of his labors was the printing of the third edition in 1914.

This account speaks for itself and little comment is necessary. One wonders how much actual translation could be done on Oriental Scriptures, for example, by a single man who has not specialized in one particular field. There is the suspicion that Schermerhorn means "adaptation" rather than "re-translation."

Schermerhorn divides this book into sections; each section containing general selections from the religious writings of various peoples. Included are Egyptian, Persian, Brahmanic, Chinese, Jewish, Buddhist, Grecian, Roman, Christian, and Islamic Scriptures. There is no attempt made to compare or contrast the selections or ideas contained with them. There are no ascriptions or indications whatsoever as to the precise source of material used, the translator, etc. In his general preface Schermerhorn accounts for this in an entirely unsatisfactory manner:

No attempt has been made to give the names of authors; the nationality, or what may be called the school of thought, such as Persian, Egyptian, Hindu, etc., has been deemed sufficient. Of the Truth contained in them, as of all Truth wherever found, the author is the Eternal One; and it matters but little by what name may be called the human instrument through whom He has chosen to reveal it. Better, perhaps, that the name be entirely forgotten, in order that Truth may be "all in all."<sup>1</sup>

If the criticism of Mr. Schermerhorn's efforts has been harsh here it is due entirely to his unscientific methods of production and the unusual claims he makes for his accomplishments. That he was sincere in his work and in his desire to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. xviii.



spread the gospel of Universal Religion is beyond dispute and can only be commended, but the volume has no place among other works of this type, either in scholarship or method, and is only included in this study as an illustration of some of the poorer pioneer attempts to compile selections from the world's religious writings.

More substantial than Schermerhorn's efforts were those of Jenkin Lloyd Jones, an indefatigable worker for the sympathetic understanding of different religions and its spread. He was born in South Wales in 1843 and came to this country with his parents when he was still an infant. They settled on a farm in Wisconsin and the boy stayed there until 1862 when he became a private in the 6th Wisconsin Battery, serving in the Civil War for three years. When the war was over he enrolled in the Meadville Theological Seminary, Meadville, Pa., and graduated with a B.D. degree in 1870. He became pastor of the All Souls Church in Janesville, Wisconsin, in 1871 and remained there until 1880. From 1875 to 1884 he was secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference. Jones organized and was the first secretary of the Western Unitarian Sunday School Society from 1874 until 1880. In 1878 he joined with others to establish the weekly paper, "Unity" which is still in existence today. Feeling the need of a new Unitarian Society on Chicago's near South Side, Jones in 1882 organized and became pastor of the All Souls Church. He was secretary of the World's Parliament of Religions which held sessions in connection with the Centennial Exposition in Chicago from 1892 to 1893, and was instrumental in organizing the Congress of Religion in 1894, holding the post of general secretary until 1905. Jones was the first president of the Illinois State Conference of Charities and held office from 1895 until 1907.



In 1893 he lectured in English at the University of Chicago. He was also president of the Tower Hill Summer School of Literature and Religion, an institution which he founded in 1889 in Wisconsin, and was the founder and first president of the Chicago Browning Society. Besides this work, Jones was the author of several books and many pamphlets, which included his sermons. He died in 1918.<sup>1</sup>

Jenkin Lloyd Jones is included in this study because of the prodigious amount of work he did in connection with the World's Parliament of Religions. Under the direction of Dr. John Henry Barrows, Jones and other willing workers conceived and carried into execution the idea of holding a great congress of religions in Chicago where representatives of all the different religions the world over could gather in friendship and goodwill. The position of secretary for this World's Parliament of Religions was held by Jones and fulfilled in admirable manner. While the Parliament, itself, was not intended to stimulate the study of specific religions, "but sought merely to unite in the bonds of fellowship and common esteem those whom differing conceptions of Religion had too long sufficed to keep asunder,"<sup>2</sup> the publishing of the records of this parliament in 1893. (The World's Parliament of Religions, 2 vols., Chicago, 1893) did much to stimulate original and advanced research into this field and to popularize the investigations of scholars in these studies. This parliament was the first effort of its kind ever attempted that was recognized as such, and was successful enough to encourage others to call further congresses in the next century. The organizers of this gathering realized the danger of heated discussion and argument which such a unique enterprise

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<sup>1</sup>Dict. of Amer. Biog., vol. X, pp. 179-180.

<sup>2</sup>Jordan, p. 199.



might bring and therefore did not invite or permit any formal comparison of the Religions which were presented by the various representatives on the platform. Every precaution in regard to this was taken with careful foresight, but it was too much to expect that the leaders of the religions represented and their auditors would contain themselves in complete tolerance, and long before the Parliament closed its doors acrimonious debates were held in private groups.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of Jones' death John Haynes Holmes wrote in the Christian Register, "No man was more largely responsible for the World's Parliament of Religions....than he, and no man did more in ways of practical labor for the success of this epoch making assembly."<sup>2</sup>

Jones is also remembered for the series of Sunday School lessons intended for liberal churches which he began publishing in 1882. These were radically different from all contemporary courses because they emphasized the evolution of man, the analogies in different world mythologies, and the ethical harmony of the great world religions. Furthermore they envisaged the flowering of Christianity into a universal religion of ethical theism, and contained the credos in verse of great modern poets.<sup>3</sup> His lectures and sermons also contained much material which was relevant to the consideration of other religions than Christian, with the thought throughout that the strains of a universal, ethical religion ran through them all, and that in this the best sentiments of mankind were expressed.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>"Jenkin Lloyd Jones," The Christian Register, A. U. A., Boston, Sept. 26, 1918, p. 930.

<sup>3</sup>Dict. of Amer. Biog., v. X., p. 180.



Other Unitarians contributed to the impulse which was at that period being given to thinking about world religions. James Vila Blake was a good example of those who made individual efforts in their own churches or loyal spheres of activity for the spread of knowledge about other religions. Blake was ordained into the liberal ministry in 1867, having studied at Harvard, and was installed as pastor of the Haverhill, Massachusetts Unitarian Church in 1867, remaining there until 1869. He was minister of the 28th Congregational Society in Boston from 1869 until 1872 and then came to the middle-west, where he occupied the pulpit of the Second Congregational Church in Quincy, Illinois, until 1883. Blake's next parish was that of the Third Unitarian Church on Chicago's west side and he stayed there for fourteen years. He then became pastor of the Church of All Souls in Evanston, Illinois, remaining there until 1916. Blake had a poetic gift and produced several books of poetry. He also wrote hymns and collaborated in the production of a hymn book, and a book of devotional services. In addition many of his sermons went into print.<sup>1</sup>

Blake, like Jenkin Lloyd Jones, was tremendously interested in the Sunday School and endeavored to present the children with a comprehensive course on the religions of other peoples. It is said that he always held Sunday School before church so that he would be fresh when he instructed the young folks in the practices and beliefs of foreign lands. He firmly believed that not only should the Christian Bible be in a minister's pulpit, but the Bibles of other religions as well, and when he

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<sup>1</sup> Who Was Who in America (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1942), Vol. 1.



built a new church in Evanston he had the contractor install a set of shelves on the platform in the wall behind the pulpit. It was his fond dream that someday the Sacred Scriptures of all lands would fill those shelves, and although he did not live to see this dream come true, within the last two years the present minister of that church, Rev. John Nicholls Booth, sent out an appeal to his parishioners and one of them after great cost and long search, obtained a set of The Sacred Books of the East, which now fills the long empty spaces. It is a beautiful tribute to the memory of one who knew and loved the religious sentiments of people of different lands.

James Vila Blake conscientiously believed, however, that Christianity was more persuasive and further along in the evolution of man's religious expression than any other religion, but he could and did give these other religions their due consideration, and was never dogmatic in his Christianity. He saw the picture as a whole - all religions included, with Christianity standing out as a leader. Thus in his sermon on the "Heart of All Religions" he says:

I have found great delight, mental and moral glow, spiritual inspiration, in reading the Scriptures of other religions besides the Hebrew and the Christian. And 'tis no wonder; for why should I not be lifted on wings that have proved strong to bear whole nations heavenward? Not alone the Hebrew and Christian histories, preachings, psalms, laws, precepts, exhortations, warnings, have been strength, comfort and instruction in temple, hall and home, but the Scriptures of all other religions, too. All have been mighty to command, to inspire, to uphold holy lives, support self-sacrifice unto death, and sustain humble, life-long faithfulness. Wherefore, I say, 'tis no wonder that holy pages of Scripture which have beamed so much for other men, however of a different climate, countenance and race, should shine also with a white and holy light to me.

Now, in reading these other Scriptures, I have observed four stages in myself. At first I found



little in them--only here and there a bit that truly appealed to my mind and stirred me. On the whole I looked on them slightly. I gleaned from them no more than certain precepts. These Scriptures of the nations were alien to me, foreign to my habits of mind and feeling, not fitted to my mental experience or my religious expressions. Hence, as I say, I slighted them, and from my shallow dips into them was wont to return to our own Bible with a new emphasis, an enlarged conception of the vast advantage and superior grandeur of our Scriptures.

My second stage came slowly. It resulted from frequent returns to other Scriptures, till by many resorts to them and by some happy circumstances, I was led to read them deeply and long and linger over them. Then they became to me far more than an assemblage of precepts, or fields where I might glean here and there some fine bits of moral wisdom. Slowly I entered into the spirit of them. I began to go to them as to something living and moving with human life lifting itself to the Divine Life. Then I was impressed, filled and moved; then I admired and revered; because I had come to the spirit of them sympathetically in some measure, as those people do in large measure whom the Scriptures feed and inspire in the native abodes of them.

My third stage was a return to our own Bible after this sympathetic and deeper reading of other Scriptures. My former judgment seemed to me to be maintained and assured. The Hebrew Scriptures still seemed exceedingly grander, vaster, richer, deeper than all others. But now I had the advantage--a great one--of better equipment for judging. I found my love of our own Scriptures quickened and dignified by my sympathy, if I may say so, with Scripture itself, which I had found living in all Scriptures.

This led to a fourth stage, which is a heightened and joyful sense of the greater glory and grandeur of the Hebrew Bible, not merely in comparison with others, nay, nor mainly so, but chiefly by its part in the glory of the whole, because it stands not alone on a plain, but towers above comrade peaks, all of which pierce the heavens. Then the full splendor and the grand height of the Hebrew Scriptures begin to appear, when they show in this fellowship with all Bibles, the most sublime stanzas of one sublime psalm heard everywhere on the earth which is Religion itself.<sup>1</sup>

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James Vila Blake, Unity Mission Tract 37, "The Heart of All Religions."



With the close of the 19th century, the unique endeavors of American Unitarians in pioneering the field of the comparative study of religions were finished. It had now become a well-established scientific pursuit in which investigators from many different denominations took part. The distinctive work of the Unitarians was over. Intellectuals were ready to believe now with Max Müller that

If we but listen attentively we can hear in all religions a groaning of the spirit, a struggle to conceive the inconceivable, to utter the unutterable, a longing after the infinite, a love of God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.



## APPENDIX I

### MISS HANNAH ADAMS

#### Bibliographical Notes:

For a very summary but evaluative account of Miss Adams, see Jordan's Comparative Religion, Its Genesis and Growth.<sup>1</sup>

Hannah Adams is mentioned in Van Wyck Brooks' The Flowering of New England, in this manner:

Boston was not London; but at least in the Athenaeum one might have seen, even years before, the well-known Hannah Adams, working on her history of the Jews, the lady of whom one heard so many stories, as that they were obliged to lock her in, because it was not polite to lock her out. Living, Miss Adams was the only female who ventured to claim her statutory right to browse in these, to her, celestial pastures. Dead, as she was soon to be, she was the "first tenant" of Mount Auburn, or so her gravestone said, though a Boston lawyer, pondering the inscription, remarked, "She cannot properly be called a tenant."<sup>2</sup>

Regarding her denominational preference the following remarks found in her Memoirs are instructive:

After removing to Boston, and residing in that city while the disputes upon Unitarian sentiments were warmly agitated, I read all that came in my way upon both sides of the question; and carefully examined the New Testament, with, I think, a sincere and ardent desire to know the truth. I deeply felt the difficulties upon both sides of the question; yet prevaillingly give the preference to that class of Unitarians, who adopt the highest idea of the greatness and dignity of the Son of God. I never arrived to that degree of decision that some have attained on that subject. In this, and every other disputable subject, I would adopt the following lines:

If I am right, thy grace impart  
Still in the right to stay;  
If I am wrong, O teach my heart,  
To find the better way.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>(Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, 1905), pp. 146-150.

<sup>2</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1936), p. 121.

<sup>3</sup>A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832).



Remarks on her Dictionary:

Although this work is primarily concerned with the various denominations within Christianity, there are large sections devoted to other religions. Miss Adams' first three editions of her study divided Christianity and other beliefs. In the first section she treated the Religious Denominations within Christianity and left the other religions to a second section which she entitled "A Brief Account of the Different Schemes of Religion now Embraced Among Mankind." The London edition of her work, however, combined the whole study into one part, renamed it a Dictionary, and placed everything under one alphabetical arrangement. In her first three editions, Miss Adams, after dealing with the Christian denominations provided a section for the general discussion of five forms of non-Christian faith--Grand Lama, Mahometans, Jews, Deists, and Skeptics. Then in a section entitled "A Short View of the Different Religions of the Several People and Kingdoms of the Habitable World" she dealt with the religions by continents, subsuming as categories the countries within the particular continent under review. An account or description, then, of the religions or denominations of Christianity came under the heading of each country. Her continents are Europe, Greenland, European Islands, Asia; including Turkey (in Asia), Russia, China, Mongolia, and Independent Tartary, Kamtschatka, India in general, and the Mogul's Empire, the Peninsula of India beyond the Ganges, Arabia, Persia--the Asiatic Islands, including Japan, Ladrone Islands, Formosa, Molucca Islands, Philippine Islands, Celebes, Sunda Islands, containing Borneo, Sumatra, Java, etc., Ceylon, Maldive Islands; Africa, including Egypt, Barbaria, containing Morocco, Fez, Algiers, Tripoli, and Barca, Biledulgerid, Negroland, Guinea, Nubia,



Ethiopia Superior, or Abyssinia, Ethiopia Inferior, Lower Guinea, containing Loango, Congo, Angolo, Bengula, and Mantaman, Caffraria, African Islands, including Madagascar, Cape Verd Islands, Canaries, and Madeiras, Zocotra, Comora; America, including the United States, British America, Spanish America, Portuguese America, Dutch America, Pagan America, American Islands, South Sea Islands (Otaheite, other Society Island, Friendly Islands, Sandwich Islands).

In her Appendix to the Third Edition she attempts to search out the agreements among the various Christian denominations, and ends by saying:

Why the Christian religion should still be confined to so small a part of the globe, is an incomprehensible mystery. But we are encouraged by many prophecies in the sacred scriptures to expect the time, when the knowledge of the truth shall be universally extended; when all superstition shall be abolished; the Jews and Gentiles unitedly become the subjects of Christ's universal empire; and the knowledge of the Lord fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dictionary, p. 504.



## APPENDIX II

### RALPH WALDO EMERSON

1. Quotations from Emerson's Journals and Works are replete in Christy's The Orient in American Transcendentalism. Apart from the particular excerpts which he uses throughout the book he provides a list of further references to Oriental Literature and Thought which may be found in Emerson's writings, as follows:

Journals, II, 474; III, 260; V, 29, 444, 449, 560; VII, 103, 109, 110, 291, 512; VIII, 79, 547-49; IX, 145, 536, 538, 539, 550; X, 100, 134, 156, 235.

Works, I, 213, 216, 222; II, 49, 243; III, 151; IV, 39, 66, 94, 95, 96, 139, 140, 172, 217, 224, 263; VI, 13, 233, 235, 272, 296; VII, 64, 70; VIII, 98, 380, 283, 343; IX, 100, 107, 294, 506; X, 100, 120, 177, 243, 546; XI, 236, 504; XII, 35, 80, 148, 235.

(See notes p. 353, Christy)

2. I have given Emerson's yearly reading lists in Oriental literature through the year 1845 in the body of this chapter. It may be instructive to continue this list here for the rest of his life.

1846: Zoroaster; Hafiz; Von Hammer Purgstall, "Translations of Hafiz."

1847: Plotinus; Synesius; Proclus; Institutes of Menu; Bhagavat-Geeta; Vishnu Purana; Confucius; Zoroaster; Saadi; Hafiz; Firdusi; Ferradeddin.

1848: Jamblichus; Heliodorus; Sidonius Apollinaris; Thomas Taylor; Mehhaduta; Vishnu Purana; Zoroaster; Hafiz; Mahomet.

1849: Desatir, or Sacred Writings of the Ancient Persian Prophets; Firdusi; Enweri; Saadi; Von Hammer Purgstall, "Geschichte der Schönen Redikunste Persiens."

1850: Proclus; Nisami; Enweri.



- 1851: Vedas; Firdusi; Saadi; Ammar.
- 1852: Plotinus; Porphyry; Sidonius Apollinaris; Saadi.
- 1853: Thomas Taylor; Firdousi, "Shah Nameh."
- 1854: Plotinus; Dionysius of Alexandria; Porphyry; Iamblichus; Synesius; Proclus; Sidonius; Bhagavat Geeta; Vyasa; Saadi; Gulistan; Hafiz.
- 1855: Plotinus; Porphyry; Iamblichus; Proclus; "Rig Veda Sanhita"; Vishnu Purana; Confucius; Koran; Ali ben Abu Talib; Saadi.
- 1856: Proclus; Upanishad; ("Brahma" composed); Hafiz.
- 1857: Iamblichus; "Sakoontala, or The Lost Ring, (by Kalidasa); Hafiz.
- 1858: Enweri; Hafiz.
- 1859: Viasa; Mahabharata, apud Alger's "Oriental Poetry"; Plotinus Apuleius.
- 1860: Plotinus; Euclid of Alexandria; Upanishad; Zoroaster; Hafiz; Arabian Nights; Abd-el-Kader; Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's Mission to China.
- 1861: Plotinus; Upanishad; Mahabharata; Viasa; Max Müller, "Comparative Mythology, etc."; Saadi.
- 1862: Kalidasa; "Nala and Damayanti"; "Books bequeathed to me by H. D. Thoreau"; Abd-el-Kader.
- 1863: Confucius, "Book of Poetry," apud J. Legge; D'Herbelot, "Biblioteque Orientale"; Saadi; Hafiz; Von Hammer Purgstall.
- 1864: "Biblioteque Orientale"; Menu; Mahomet.
- 1865: Vedas; Vishnu Purana; Zertusht (Zoroaster); Confucius; Mahomet.
- 1866: Vedas; Hafiz; Mahomet; Zoroaster(?), "Chaldean Oracles."
- 1867: Bhagavat Geeta; Vishnu Purana; Confucius.
- 1868: Menu; Bhagavat Geeta; Vishnu Purana; Hafiz; Confucius.
- 1869: Proclus; Zoroaster; the "Dabistan."
- 1870: Plotinus; Porphyry; Menu; Confucius; Averroës.
- 1871: Iamblichus; Max Müller.
- 1872: Zend-Avesta; Saadi; Sir William Jones, "To Narayena"; Arab Ballad.



1873: Max Müller.

1874: Plotinus.

(Carpenter, Appendix, pp. 260-263)

3. The following is a list of the books left to Emerson by Thoreau:

Rig Veda Sanhita;

First Ashtaka; Second Ashtaka; translated by H. H. Wilson.

Sankhya Karika, tr. by H. T. Colebrooke; and the Bhashya, or Commentary of Gaurapada, tr. by H. H. Wilson.

Lotus de la bonne loi, tr. by M. E. Burnouf.

Le Bhagavata Purana, tr. by M. E. Burnouf.

Institutes of Menu, tr. by Sir Wm. Jones.

Treatise on the Hindu Law of Inheritance, tr. by H. T. Colebrooke.

Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus, tr. by H. H. Wilson.

Vol. XV. of the Bibliotheca Indica, tr. by E. Roer; Upanishad.

Aphorisms of the Hyaya, by Gautama.

Colebrooke's Miscellaneous Essays.

Vishnu Purana, tr. by H. H. Wilson.

Nala and Damayanti, tr. by Rev. H. H. Milman.

Aphorisms of the Mimansa, by Jaimini, pamphlet.

Lecture on the Vedanta, pamphlet.

Bhasha Parichchheda, pamphlet.

It is illuminating to see just what his reading was during this period in Eastern literature. The following are extracts from the yearly reading lists of Oriental books:

1820-21: Cudworth (containing many quotations from the Neo-Platonists); Zend-avesta (apud Gibbon).

1822: Zoroaster (?); Arabian Nights; Sir William Jones, "To Narayena."

1823: "Hindu Mythology and Mathematics," apud Edinburgh Review.

1824: none.

1825: none:

1826: none.

1827: none.

1828: none.

1829: none.



1830: Plotinus; Confucius, Zoroaster, and Mahabarat (apud De Gerando).

1831: Plotinus; Porphyry.

1832: Zoroaster, Zend-Avesta, (apud Histoire de L'Academie des Inscriptions); Cousin (containing remarks on Oriental philosophy).

1833: none.

1834: Plotinus; Hermes Trismegistus; Vyasa(?) Sheking IChinese); Arabian Proverbs.

1835: none.

1836: Code of Menu; Confucius (apud Marshman; Arabian Nights.

1837: Plotinus; Calidasa, "Megha Duta" (apud Asiatic Journal, Abulfeda, Historia Muslemica).

(This list is taken from the Appendix in Carpenter, pp. 257-258.)

The following is a continuation of Emerson's yearly reading lists in Oriental books. The period covered here is from 1838 through 1845.

1838: Hermes Trismegistus; Synesius; Proclus; Thomas Taylor; Institutes of Menu; Sir William Jones, Translations of Asiatic Poetry; Buddha; Zoroaster; Confucius.

1839: Vedas.

1840: Buddha; Vedas; Sir William Jones; Zoroaster; Koran; Ockley, History of the Saracens.

1841: Plotinus; Hermes Trismegistus; Porphyry, On Abstinence from Animal Food (Taylor's translation); Iamblichus, Life of Pythagoras; Synesius; Proclus; Olympiodorus; Vishnu Sarna; Zoroaster; Confucius; Saadi; Hafiz.

1842: Plotinus; Porphyry; Iamblichus; Synesius, On Providence; Proclus; Apuleius; Vishnu Sarna; Saadi.

1843: Plotinus; Iamblichus; Synesius; Proclus; (Thomas Taylor's translations); Thomas Taylor; Sheking; The Four Books (Chinese Classics); Vishnu Sarna; Saadi; "Desatir" (Persian).

1844: Plotinus; Proclus; Thomas Taylor's translations; Zoroaster (?), Chaldaean Oracles.



1845: Proclus; Ammianus; Stobaeus; Bhagavat-Geeta; Colebrooke, "On the Vedas; Vishnu Purana; Mahomet; Hafiz; "Akhlak-I-Jalaly" (Persian).

Emerson owned Thomas Taylor's book, "Iamblichus on the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians," Chiswick Whittingham, 1821. This volume was extremely important "in augmenting Emerson's natural tendency to see one source as the origin of all systems." The introduction to this work gives an indication as to why it had such a great appeal for Emerson. The first paragraph in the introduction reads as follows:

It appears to me that there are two descriptions of persons by whom the present work must be considered to be of inestimable worth, the lovers of antiquity and the lovers of ancient philosophy and religion. To the former of these it must be invaluable, because it is replete with information derived from the wise men of the Chaldeans, the prophets of the Egyptians, the dogmas of the Assyrians, and the ancient pillars of Hermes; and to the latter, because of the doctrines contained in it, some of which originated from the Hermaic pillars, were known to Pythagoras and Plato, and were the sources of their philosophy; and others are profoundly theological, and unfold the mysteries of ancient religion with an admirable conciseness of diction, and an inimitable vigor and elegance of conception.

Thoreau also had a copy of this book in his Fruitlands library. Such a lover of Plato as was Emerson would be bound to find delight in writings which were thought to be the springs of Plato's thought.<sup>1</sup>

What Oriental ideas there were in his first two series of essays were mainly Indian ones. In his first series, published in 1841 he indicated a knowledge of the theory of the transmigration of souls, embodied in his "History" essay. Apparently, however, it was not through a reading of Hindu books that

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<sup>1</sup> Christy, op. cit., Appendix, p. 312.



he had acquired this, but from books on Neoplatonism. In the second series, published in 1844, there are other Oriental quotations than Hindu, but these are the chief ones. Still they number only four and these are Buddhist sayings, which were most likely all derived from the same source.<sup>1</sup> His Journals indicate more fully than his published writings how his interest in India was growing, as do his reading lists, mentioned above, which were taken from the Journals. There is some indication, however, that even these did not include all his readings in Oriental literature, for in a letter in 1840 he makes mention of "The Vedas, the bible of the tropics, which I find I come back upon every three or four years."<sup>2</sup> He had recorded a reading of this work only the previous year in his Journals, but this remark would seem to indicate that he had been reading in the Vedas before this time without specifically mentioning them in his Journals.<sup>3</sup> But of the five books which he had been reading in this period--"The Code of Menu," "Buddha," "The Vedas," "Veeshnu Sarma," and perhaps "The Bhagavat Gita"--the only quotations used in his writings--either Journals or Essays--before 1845 were from "Buddha."

As an example of how Emerson reflected the thinking of the East the following lines, taken from "Illusions" will show how in his own thought he could express the same sentiments as those of the Hindu "Maya" doctrine. Just as in the case of the poem "Brahma" its sense could not be understood by the average layman without a pretty fair knowledge of Indian writings.

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<sup>1</sup> See Works I, 337; III, 163, and 236; XII, 395.

<sup>2</sup> "Letters of Emerson to a Friend," (Boston, 1899), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 105-107.



Sleep is not, death is not;  
Who seem to die live.  
House you were born in,  
Friends of your spring-time,  
Old man and young maid,  
Day's toil and its guerdon,  
They are all vanishing,  
Fleeing to fables,  
Cannot be moored.  
See the stars through them,  
Through treacherous marbles.  
Know the stars yonder,  
The stars everlasting,  
Are fugitive also,  
And emulate, vaulted,  
The lambent heat lightning  
And fire-fly's flight.<sup>1</sup>

Another poem was actually given the name Māya. Its images and suggestions might be recognized by any Hindu as the thread running through his scriptures:

Illusion works impenetrable,  
Weaving webs innumerable,  
Her gay pictures never fail,  
Crowds each other, veil on veil,  
Charmer who will be believed  
By man who thirsts to be deceived.

Illusions like the tints of pearl,  
Or changing colors of the sky,  
Or ribbons of a dancing girl  
That mend her beauty to the eye.<sup>2</sup>

This poem undoubtedly has its source in the Vishnu Purana.

Scholars think that the word "Hamatreya" is a form of the word Maitreya, since there seems to be no such word as "Hamatreya" in the Hindu Vocabulary. In this poem Emerson is trying to express the idea that "the words I and mine constitute ignorance" which is a sentiment which one finds constantly in Hindu scriptures. But it is characteristic of Emerson's later thought, too. In it he used Occidental persons--Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Merriam and Flint, to illustrate this typically Oriental thought.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Works, IX, 287.

<sup>2</sup>Works, IX, 348; Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 92-94.

<sup>3</sup>Christy, op. cit., 170-171.



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